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Wind Through the Buffalo Grass: A Lakota Story Cycle

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Wind Through the Buffalo Grass:

A Lakota Story Cycle



Written and illustrated by
Paul A. Johnsgard

Wind Through the Buffalo Grass: A Lakota Story Cycle is a narrative history of the Pine Ridge Lakota tribe of South Dakota, following its history from 1850 to the present day through actual historical events and through the stories of four fictional Lakota children, each related by descent and separated from one another by two generations.

The ecology of the Pine Ridge region, especially its mammalian and avian wildlife, is woven into the stories of the children. Illustrated by the author, the book includes drawings of Pine Ridge wildlife, regional maps, and Native American pictorial art. Appendices include a listing of important Lakota words, and checklists of mammals and breeding birds of the region.

Dr. Paul A. Johnsgard is foundation professor of biological sciences emeritus of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Johnsgard's published works range from technical monographs on birds to popular titles most often on natural history subjects, but extending into mythology and folklore. Several of his more popular titles have been translated into other languages. His diverse writings have won him the Loren Eiseley Award for Scientific and Humanistic Writing, the Mari Sandoz Award for Regional Writing, as well as several state and national awards for individual books. He has been the recipient of many conservation honors, including the National Wildlife Federation's National Conservation Achievement Award (2004) and a Lifetime Achievement award from the Nebraska Wildlife Federation. He was one of six living persons to be named one of 100 notable Nebraskans of the twentieth century by both the *Omaha (Neb.) World-Herald* and the *Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star*.

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Wind Through the Buffalo Grass: A Lakota Story Cycle

Paul A. Johnsgard
with illustrations by the author

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Paul A. Johnsgard", positioned above the wolf illustration.

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Contents

List of Figures vii

Preface xi

Introduction xvii

Part I: The Lakota Spirit World (1850) 1

Chapter 1

A Place Called Porcupine and a Boy Named
Pispiza 9

Chapter 2

May 1850: The Moon of Shedding Ponies 19

Chapter 3

June 1850: Pispiza and the Prairie Dogs 29

Chapter 4

July 1850: A Prairie Dog Summer 37

**Part II: The Death of the Spirit World
(Oglala History, 1850–1900) 45**

Chapter 5

August 1900: Little Cottonwood and
the Ghosts of Wounded Knee 57

Chapter 6

September 1900: Little Cottonwood
at the Mission School 63

Chapter 7

October 1900: The Moon of Falling Leaves 69

Chapter 8

November 1900: Nights of the
Northern Shadows 77

**Part III: The Reservation World
(Oglala History, 1900–1950) 85**

Chapter 9

January 1950: Jimmy Fox and His
Winter Dreams 91

Chapter 10

February 1950: The Moon of Popping Trees 99

Chapter 11

March 1950: The Eagle Quest of Jimmy Fox 107

Part IV: The Modern World (Oglala History, 1950–2000) 117

Chapter 12

April 2000: The Cranes Return to Pine Ridge 127

Chapter 13

May 2000: A Pine Ridge Spring 139

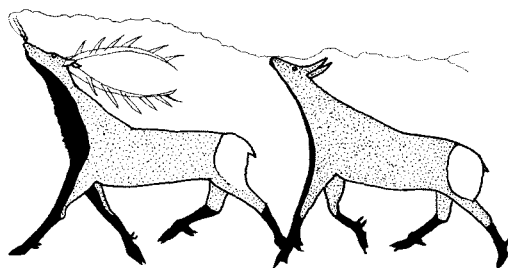
Chapter 14

June 2000: Mary Thunder: A Vision for
the Future 147

Appendices & References

1. *A Time Line of the Lakotas and Their
Land, 1849–2007* 157
2. *Dakota Tribal Divisions and a Lakota
Calendar* 182

3. *Mammals and Summer Birds of the Pine Ridge Region* 187
4. *Suggested Readings* 205



List of Figures

Title Page: Gray Wolf

Contents: Dakota pictograph of elk courting vi

Part 1. Map of southwestern Dakota
Territory, circa 1860 xxvi

Chapter 1. Golden eagle, in flight 8

Chapter 2. Bison bellowing 18

2a. White-tailed jackrabbit 21

2b. Bison male, female, and calf 24

Chapter 3. Dakota drum design 28

3a. Prairie dog, female and young 32

Chapter 4. Dakota shield design 36

4a. Black-footed ferret 43

LIST OF FIGURES

**Part 2: Map of the western part of the
Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 1884 44**

Chapter 5. Dakota shield design 56

Chapter 6. Dakota shield design 62

Chapter 7. Dakota shield design 68

7a. Two pronghorn males fighting 72

Chapter 8. Dakota shield design 76

8a. Coyote howling 80

Part 3: Golden eagle, head portrait 84

Chapter 9. Dakota shield design 90

Chapter 10. Dakota shield design 98

10a. Swift fox 101

Chapter 11. Dakota shield design 106

11a. Mule deer male 111

LIST OF FIGURES

Part 4. Map of the western part of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 2006 116

Chapter 12. Dakota shield design 126

12a. Sharp-tailed grouse, male dancing 130

12b. Sandhill cranes dancing 135

Chapter 13. Elk stag 138

13a. Burrowing owl family 141

Chapter 14. Golden eagle in flight 146

Appendices: Pronghorn male 156

Suggested Readings: Bison male 204

Note: All drawings by author, but the Native American images were redrawn from historic Dakota drum and shield designs (Brown, 1992, and Wissler, 1907)

Preface

Although I was raised primarily in Wahpeton, North Dakota, it was not until I was in high school that I learned that the town's name in the Dakota (Siouan) language means "Dwellers Among the Leaves," and refers to a tribe of Dakotas that once lived in the Bois de Sioux ("Woods of the Sioux") River Valley. Indeed, an Indian School, an off-reservation federal boarding school, is located at the very northwestern edge of town. When I was a child, the Indian School was situated beyond all of Wahpeton's residential limits, with about a quarter mile of farmland between the two. In part because of this physical separation, and especially because of the vast cultural divide that then existed, there were simply no social contacts between the students of the Wahpeton public or parochial schools and those of the Indian School. The children of the Indian School could not have been more fully isolated from the general population of Wahpeton if they had been incarcerated. Now, a half-century later, I have come to believe that such was perilously close to the truth.

I delivered a few copies of the local town newspaper to the Indian School during my teenage years. My route covered the entire western end of Wahpeton, and my deliveries extended north out to the Indian School, except on those few winter days when blizzards made bicycling that distance against an icy north wind nearly impossible. My mother, a juvenile officer for the

PREFACE

county during that same period, had frequent professional contacts with the Indian School's administrators, often involving cases of Native children trying to escape and return home. She sometimes told me of the sad stories that she heard from these children, but neither she nor I ever learned enough to understand the overall social environment at the Indian School. My mother was partly of Mohawk descent (dating back all the way to Joseph Brant's family of the late 1700s), and she taught me to revere and honor our family's few remaining truly American genes. It is through her influence that my published writings have often reflected Native American ideas and values, and I especially treasure her memory in this regard.

It was not until I read Peter Mathiessen's *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse* that I learned that Leonard Peltier had entered the Wahpeton Indian School when he was about ten years old in the fall of 1953, the year I left Wahpeton permanently to enter graduate school. He later gained national notoriety during the Wounded Knee uprising of 1973, and is serving two consecutive life terms after being convicted of killing two FBI agents at that time. Mathiessen's book describes the recent history of Wounded Knee in a far better way than I could. His writings, as well as those of authors such as Ian Frazier, George Hyde, Forest Seymour, and Rex Smith, have all informed my knowledge of the tragic and tangled history of the Pine Ridge country. I owe them and many other writers my gratitude.

In the following chapters I have tried to tell several

PREFACE

fictional stories that relate to 150 years of actual Oglala history occurring in southwestern South Dakota from 1850 to 2000, but I have avoided literature citations or more historical facts than seemed necessary to carry the separate stories forward. Thus the need for including a preliminary historical overview seemed obvious, in order to place the stories in some kind of social and historic context, and similar historic introductions precede each of the four chronological parts. I have primarily told the stories of four young people, each related by descent but separated by fifty-year intervals in this culture's excessively sad history, as well as parallel stories about the changing animal life and ecology of those times and this place. I thereby hope that some insight will be gained into the varied and interlacing natural and human histories that have occurred here. To the best of my ability, I have tried to tell an accurate story of Lakota history through the eyes of four Oglala children, although all these characters are entirely fictional.

In the text I have provided Lakota words for many animals and some geographic localities, and have tried to present the traditional Lakota worldview to the extent of my own limited knowledge. I have also tried to incorporate some appropriate Lakota quotes and historic symbolism, such as dividing the text into four major parts because four is the most symbolic of all Dakota numbers. The number seven, representing the seven subtribes of the western Lakota-speaking Dakotas, is reflected in my choice of clustering the chap-

PREFACE

ters in groups of three and four. There is a total of fourteen chapters, a number encompassing all thirteen Dakota tribes, plus one for the collective cultural unit that is often widely, if inaccurately, called the "Sioux."

A Navajo artist, Pablo Marquez, did the evocative cover painting of a golden eagle. Pablo Marquez was a promising art student at the University of New Mexico in the early 1980s. Now apparently deceased, his memorable painting reflects the Native American symbolism of eagle feathers. It also reflects a more general Native American circular design symbolism, and I am very pleased to have used it in tribute to his memory. I have similarly used circular designs derived from historic Dakota shield and drum decorations as sectional dividers.

I have needed much help in these matters, and must thank a variety of people for their assistance. Especially I thank Linda Brown for carefully reading early drafts of the manuscript and making many useful suggestions. Margaret MacKichan, art instructor at Sinte Gleska University, Mission, South Dakota, was a wonderful source of information on Lakota art and culture. Thanks also to Phyllis Stone, Lincoln, Nebraska, who taught a Lakota language class in which I enrolled. Roger Reyda, a fellow student, provided me with several useful ideas, references, and contacts. Duane Gudgel of Valentine, Nebraska, was a valuable source of information on the Rosebud Reservation. Jerry Wilson and Bernie Honhoff also offered advice on local contacts in the Pine Ridge Reservation. Finally, Cris

PREFACE

Trautner took an interest in publishing the manuscript about the time I had given up hope of ever finding an outlet for it.

Introduction

Once a great flood swept over the western plains and the peoples of many tribes retreated to the highest hills to escape. As the water rose, the people drowned, their bodies turning to red stone. Then an eagle swooped low enough to allow a woman to grab its legs and be carried away to a tall tree growing on the region's highest cliff. There the woman mated with the eagle and gave birth to twins. These twins began the Dakota tribe. Thereafter, in remembrance, the feather of an eagle was worn on the heads of warriors, and a pipe made from the red stone was to be smoked as a symbol of peace.

—Dakota Myth

The grass-mantled High Plains and granite-sinewed Black Hills of South Dakota are the traditional and spiritual home of the Dakotas, once the most widely feared Native American tribe of the northern Great Plains. The term the Dakotas historically used to describe themselves, *Dakota Oyate*, means an “allied people.” To European settlers, the Dakotas became widely called the Sioux, a term derived from *Naduesiu*, a French corruption of an Algonquian word meaning “enemies” or “snakes.”

INTRODUCTION

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The Dakotas reached the Great Plains fairly late in American history, after having repeatedly moved from their unknown but often postulated origins somewhere in the American Southeast during early colonial times. Gradually drifting toward the west, there is evidence that they arrived in the Upper Mississippi Valley by the late 1600s. They lived along the Minnesota River Valley and in the forested lake country of central Minnesota until the early 1700s.

During the early 1700s, part of the Dakota population expanded west into the tall grasslands of the eastern Great Plains, where big game such as elk, bison, and pronghorn were present in great abundance. By the time the westernmost expansion branch of the Dakotas, the Tetons, had reached the banks of the Missouri River in the middle 1700s, they had adapted to the harsh living conditions and special survival strategies required for life on the grassy plains. They probably first obtained horses from the Arikaras or other Missouri River tribes about 1750. Acquiring horses undoubtedly made the Dakotas far more mobile and formidable than they had been previously. By 1775 they crossed the Missouri River and had reached the Black Hills.

While expanding westward into what is now west-central South Dakota during the 1700s, the Dakotas repeatedly encountered and sought to acquire dominance over a succession of resident Missouri Valley tribes, including the Mandans, Arikaras, Poncas, and Omahas. Because of their fearless bravery and the fact

that the river-dwelling tribes had already been greatly weakened by smallpox and other disease brought in by the whites, the Dakotas usually prevailed during their many hostile encounters. After crossing the Missouri and wresting the Black Hills from earlier residents such as the Crows, Northern Cheyennes, and Kiowas, the Dakotas continued west, eventually reaching the sage-covered semidesert uplands and the base of the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming.

As they expanded west across the Missouri River into the High Plains, the Dakotas came to depend upon the vast, uncountable herds of bison (*tatanka*) that would eventually become the centerpiece of their worldly existence and a primary object of their spiritual veneration, especially after they had acquired horses. To the Dakotas the horse was known as *sunka wakan*, the “powerful dog” that could pull a travois, carry a heavy load of goods, and provide a perfect method of facilitating both hunting and battle. Once on horseback, the Dakotas could more easily follow the migrating bison herds, and could effectively attack them with lances and arrows with greater safety and much higher chances of success than had previously been possible on foot. Acquiring horses also prepared the Dakotas for their eventual bloody battles with the *wasicu*, the white men.

As the Dakotas spread westward, they gradually subdivided into three distinct groups, all speaking various dialects of the same general Siouan language. Toward the north and east, extending all the way back to

the Minnesota River, was the original Dakota-speaking Santee group. Farther west, from the James and Vermillion rivers to the Missouri River, were the Nakota-speaking Yanktons and Yanktonais. The adventurous group that occupied the endless arid grasslands from the Missouri River west to present-day eastern Montana and eastern Wyoming were the Lakota-speaking Teton. The word Teton refers not to the Teton Mountains of Wyoming but to *titunwan*, meaning "those who live on the prairies."

A northern branch of the Teton Dakotas, the Saone, gradually occupied the prairie lands north of the Cheyenne River, in the valleys of the Moreau, Grand, and Cannon Ball tributaries of the Upper Missouri River. This branch forced the resident Crows northwest into Montana, the Northern Cheyenne into Wyoming, and ultimately expanded the Siouan-speaking empire to encompass much of the best bison-hunting grounds of the northern plains. Sitting Bull was the most famous chief of the Hunkpapa branch of this northern group.

The Oglalas and Brules were the southern Lakota-speaking component of the Teton. By 1800 they had dislodged the Black Hills' prior residents and claimed the Hills to be their sacred home forever, a belief that they still firmly cling to two centuries later. The Oglalas also controlled the prairie lands east of the Black Hills between the Cheyenne River and the Bad River, all the way to the western banks of the Missouri River. The Brules occupied the adjoining region along

the White River and other prairie streams flowing northeast into the Missouri River. The Teton Dakota's sphere of dominance extended south roughly to Nebraska's Niobrara River, where they encountered the Poncas and Omahas. During bison hunts they seasonally ranged still farther south to the Platte and Republican valleys, where they encountered and often battled with the resident and formidable Pawnees.

By 1860 the horse-mounted and widely feared "Sioux" had become the most powerful tribe on the western plains of North America, the western Teton Dakota branch including about 7,500 Oglalas and 4,000 Brules. To the north there were also several thousand of the Dakota-dialect Saones, producing a total maximum population of 20,000 or more Siouan-speaking people. However, their battles with the U.S. military during the 1860s and 1870s, together with starvation and the ravages of diseases, may have reduced the Sioux population by as much as half by the end of the 1880s.

The U.S. government's General Allotment Act of 1887 (sometimes called the Dawes Severalty Act) soon began to eliminate all surviving tribal cultures, and began converting reservation land into small, individually owned allotments. This action eliminated the opportunities for traditional open-range hunting. The Sioux Agreement of 1889 later provided for allotments of 320 acres to heads of households and 160 acres for all other members of a family, up somewhat from an earlier maximum of 160 acres per head of household

as stipulated by the Dawes Act. Outsiders could also legally buy reservation lands when unallocated or "excess" reservation lands were declared as surplus. The Teton Dakotas initially rejected the entire allotment scheme and were the last to begin taking their individual allotments, each of which was given along with a small monetary reward, a supply of seeds, and some horses and farming equipment.

By 1890 the federal government had established many reservation-based day school and boarding schools, as well as some non-reservation boarding schools. Religious boarding schools had also been established at several reservations, including the Catholic Holy Rosary School at the Pine Ridge Agency, established in 1888. Until 1900, church-based schools received financial subsidies from the federal government on a per-student basis. However, as public opposition to these subsidies increased, the subsidies were terminated, although the schools continued to operate.

Many Native American children attended government-run schools, which included reservation-based day schools and boarding schools, as well as some non-reservation boarding schools. The non-reservation schools, such as the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, exposed the children to many white man's diseases such as tuberculosis, and prepared them for farming futures wholly impractical for the reservation conditions of the arid West, where both the climate and soils made farming nearly impossible.

The reservation boarding schools likewise assumed

that Natives would adopt the white man's culture, and also provided vocational training with an emphasis on farming practices. The reservation day schools, with the poorest facilities and lowest educational standards, were considered to be the most suitable for educating Natives. In these governmental schools, as well as in church-based reservation schools run by missionaries, only English was taught, attendance at Christian services was required, and the use of Native languages or Native religious ceremonies were both prohibited. Every effort was made in these schools to eliminate all traditional tribal culture, religions, customs, dress, art, and language. These nearly genocidal efforts on the part of both church and government finally succeeded. Now, slightly more than a century later, little evidence is left of the social structure that once held the Native American plains cultures together.

Among the Lakota-speaking Dakotas that historically occupied southwestern South Dakota, the Oglalas ("Scattered Camps") are also still mostly living on the Pine Ridge Reservation. This reservation now consists of Shannon, Washabaugh, and part of Jackson counties, southwestern South Dakota. About 15,000 people were living on the 1.7-million-acre Pine Ridge Reservation in 2000. By then about 36 percent of the reservation's original 2.8-million-acre area had been sold and was privately owned by non-Indians. About 30 percent of the remaining reservation area was still owned by individual members through acreage allotments, 30 percent was owned collectively by the

Oglala tribe, and 9 percent was owned by the federal government.

Two of the other Lakota-dialect groups were historically distributed as far north as western North Dakota and eastern Montana. The Hunkpapas ("Head of the Camp Circle") were centered in present-day western North Dakota. The Sihasapas ("Blackfeet Sioux") were centered in present-day northwestern South Dakota and adjacent southwestern North Dakota. Both groups now live mostly on the 2.3-million-acre Standing Rock Reservation, Corson County, South Dakota, and Sioux County, North Dakota, which had a population of about 8,250 residents in 2000.

The rest of the seven Lakota-dialect tribal divisions were historically affiliated with South Dakota. The Brules or Sicangos ("Burnt Thighs") are now mostly associated with the Rosebud Reservation, Todd County, south-central South Dakota. About 10,000 persons were living on this 900,000-acre reservation in 2000. The Sans Arcs ("Without Arrows") or Itazipcos were centered in present-day western South Dakota. The Minneconjous ("Planters by Water") were centered along the Missouri River in present-day west-central South Dakota. The Oohenonpas ("Two Kettles") were centered in present-day north-central South Dakota. All three of these groups now live on the 1.4-million-acre Cheyenne River Reservation, Dewey and Ziebach counties, South Dakota. This reservation had a population of about 8,500 residents in 2000.

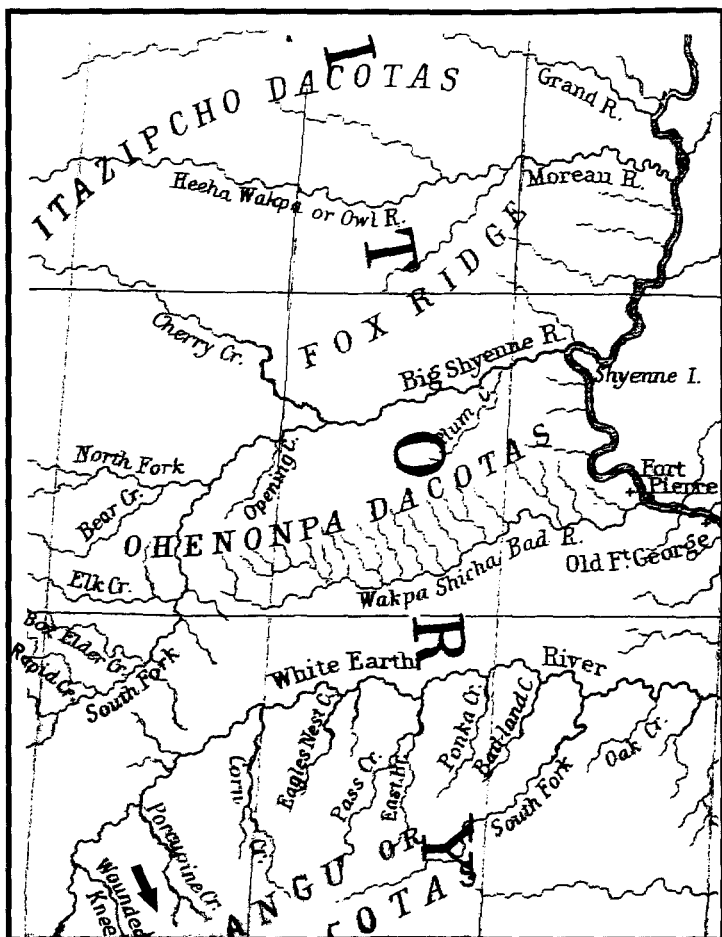
In spite of their calamitous tribal history and the se-

INTRODUCTION

vere social hardships associated with chronic governmental abuse, rampant poverty, malnutrition, disease, and alcoholism on these reservations, the overall tribal Dakota population has slowly increased since 1890. However, they remain largely invisible to most American people, and our treatment of Native Americans remains a dark chapter in our country's history that nearly all non-Natives either do not know about or would prefer to forget. However, as Mary Crow Dog once painfully wrote, "Sioux and elephants never forget."

*"A people without history is like wind
through the buffalo grass."*

—Tasunke Witco (Crazy Horse)



Map of southwestern Dakota Territory, ca. 1860, showing historic homelands of the Itzipcho (= Sans Arcs), Oohenunpa (= Two Kettles), and Sicangu (= Brule) Dakota tribes, and the location (arrow) of Porcupine Butte. Adapted from a map in *Mitchell's New General Atlas*, Philadelphia: Samuel A. Mitchell, Jr, 1860.

Part I:

The Lakota Spirit World (1850)

“There is one star for the evening and one for the morning. One star never moves and is wakan. Other stars move in a circle about it. They are dancing in the dance circle.”

—Ringing Shield, in *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, by J. R. Walker, edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1991)

In what is now southwestern South Dakota, just south of the deeply eroded and nearly waterless *Mako Sica* badlands, a pine-covered ridge of hills curves gracefully northeast out of northwestern Nebraska in the general shape of a cavalry saber, its tip pointed ominously toward the tiny Oglala Lakota village of Wounded Knee. The escarpment is the *Wasi Ahanhan*, the Pine Ridge. The village, in turn, is located beside a shallow creek, *Chanke Opi Wakpala* (Wounded Knee Creek), named for a nearly forgotten incident when an Oglala brave was said to have been

seriously wounded in the knee by the arrow of a marauding Crow.

The landscape here is as gently hilly as the top of a summer cloud, with native prairies of ankle-deep buffalo grass and grama grass covering the slopes, except where the grasses are interrupted by scattered stands of ponderosa pines. It is April, and the prairie is still golden brown after just emerging from a winter blanket of snow. The contrasting dark green and long-needled ponderosa pines represent the last remnants of the Pine Ridge forest trying to survive in the bone-dry landscapes of the High Plains. Mostly the pines are huddled along the shaded, north-facing slopes of steep hills, where they can partially escape the intense drying heat of summer.

Not far west of Wounded Knee Creek is a high, rounded butte, its northern slopes densely covered by pines, so that from a distance it takes the form of a giant porcupine (*pahhini*), the pine trees forming an outline of raised quills along its back. It is by far the highest point in the region, and from its top one can see the faint lines of dark hills lying far to the west, the Lakota's sacred *Paha Sapa*, or Black Hills.

Before the influence of the Christian religion, the Lakotas believed in many powerful spirits (*Wakan Kin* or *Wakan Tanka*) whose existence and activities were beyond understanding. Some of these *Wakan* were more powerful than others, and some were beneficial while others were evil. The greatest or more superior of the *Wakan* were called *Wakan Wankutu*, while the rest

were called *Taku Wakan*. Collectively, the *Wakampi* were all the spirits existing above mankind, including both those that did good and those that did evil.

In addition, each human being was believed to have a spirit (*nagi*), a ghost (*niya*), and a guardian (*sicun*). The guardian helped to warn of danger and also helped the guarded person to choose right over wrong. When a man died, his spirit (*wica nagi*) left the body and began a long journey, sometimes accompanied by the spirits of his horse and dog. He passed along the spirit road (Milky Way) on his way to the spirit world, where, if and when he reached it, he would live in spirit tips and do only what gave him pleasure.

Everything on earth, including animals, plants, and even inanimate objects, had a spirit-like aspect (*nag-ila*) that was to some degree *Wakan*-like. These less powerful but *Wakan*-like entities were called *wakan*, such as a shaman (*wicasa wakan*), horses (*sunka wakan*), or intoxicating liquors (*mini wakan*). Anything mysterious was called *taku wakan*. Some of the visible *wakan* objects were the sun (*Wi*), the moon (*Hanwi*), the North Star, the morning and evening stars, and the rainbow. Some constellations were *wakan*, such as the seven stars (the Big Dipper or spoon-with-long-tail). Some of the invisible but powerful *wakan* entities were the Thunderbird (*Wakinyan*), the North Wind (*Yate*), the East Wind (*Yampa*), the West Wind (*Eya*), and the South Wind (*Okaga*). It was important for all Lakotas to pay proper homage to

these powerful spirits, for they controlled the destinies of all humans.

The four cardinal directions are representative of many other *wakan* things that occur in groups of four, such as the four winds, the four seasons, four-legged animals, four periods of human life, and four kinds of gods (the great, the near great, the gods below, and the spirit gods). Because of the significance of this number, many ceremonies or rituals had elements of fours, such as being repeated four times or occurring over a four-day period. The numeral seven was also especially significant, as were combinations of four and seven, such as repeating seven songs four times.

In the traditional Lakota worldview, the circle is sacred. Nearly all in nature is circular, including the sun, the moon, the earth, and the sky. The sun and the moon go in great circles in the sky, and the stars also make a slow circular dance around the stationary star of the north. For these reasons the Lakotas made their tipis circular, they arranged their tipis around a central point in a circular manner, and they sat in a circular manner during all their ceremonies. The tip of a pipe must be moved in a circular manner four times before it is ritually smoked, and a person who is praying to the Spirits of the Four Winds must turn in a complete circle when so doing. The circle is also the symbol of a year, and a circle marks the edges of the world, where each of the Four Winds resides.

A circular design that is entirely red designates the sun; if it is blue, it represents the sky. Many boulders

and rocks are also round; such rocks and boulders are *wakan*. When a circular design is divided into four parts, these separate components signify the Four Winds. If a circle is divided into many parts, it represents a vision.

Life is also circular, from one's birth to death and the rebirth of another generation. The most important of all Lakota ceremonies, the Sun Dance, is always performed in a circular arena. The Sun Dance has always been performed during the long days of summer when the moon is perfectly circular.

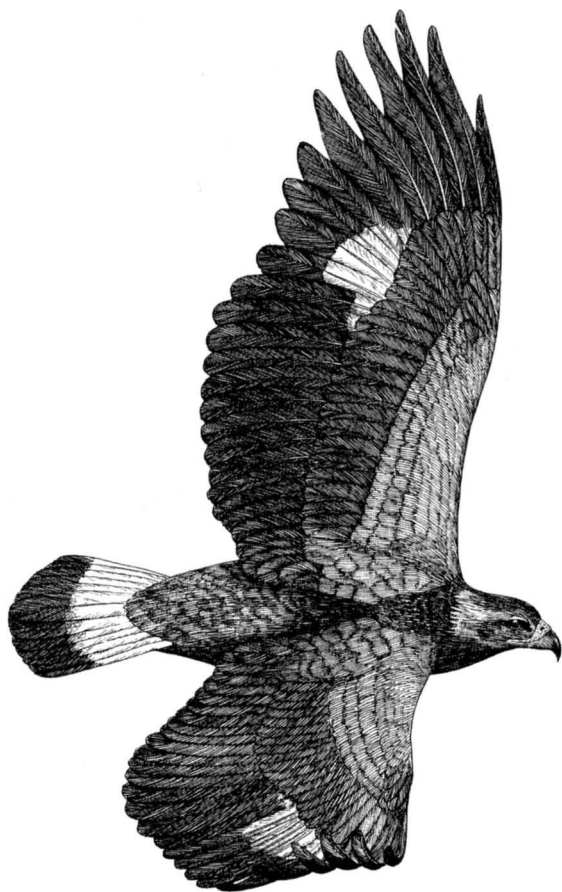
The Lakota's sun-gazing ceremony, *Wi-wanyank-wacipi*, was the greatest of Oglala religious rituals, embracing all of the many ceremonies that related to the Lakota gods. It lasted four days and was celebrated only once a year, during the longest days of summer and at the time of the full moon. All the people of a tribe could take part in the ceremony, and anyone could dance, including men, women, and children. However, the women and children participated in the Sun Dance differently and, unlike the men, were not tested for their bravery and endurance.

For a man, the Sun Dance could traditionally be performed in any of several ways. First, he might sun-gaze (*wiwayan wacipi*) from dawn to dusk, risking permanent blindness. Second, he could have both of his breasts pierced by a steel awl (*tainspa*) through which two wooden skewers (*wicapahilokapi*) are inserted. These skewers were then tied to rawhide thongs that in turn were tied to the central dance pole. The

dancer must then lean back and pull on the thongs until most of his weight was transferred to them, while facing into the sun. Third, he could have his back similarly pierced and then be suspended about a foot off the ground between four poles (*okaske wacipi*). Fourth, thongs could be tied to two skewers that had been inserted through his back, and these were in turn tied to one or more buffalo skulls, which he painfully dragged around the dance arena (*ptepa yuslohanpi*). During these activities, the participant mastered his pain and proclaimed his courage by blowing on a hollow whistle made from the upper wing bone of an eagle.

In all of the last three types of sacrifice, the participants continued their performance until their flesh was torn through and they were released. No eating or drinking was allowed during the ordeal. At the end of the fourth day, any remaining dancers were freed, and the Sun Dance was over. All the dancers who performed the Sun Dance ceremony were thereby endowed with great powers, including an ability to heal the sick. For an Oglala man to bear the scars of having participated in a Sun Dance was to insure great respect from all who met him.

PART I: THE LAKOTA SPIRIT WORLD (1850)



Golden eagle, in flight

Chapter 1

A Place Called Porcupine, and a Boy Named Pispiza

“*Wakan Tanka* was the Great Spirit. He was above all spirits. He did nothing (by himself). He was chief of all things. Indians did not know much about him. They invoked only the spirits that were under him. They asked him to make the other spirits do as they wished. He stayed above as some Indians thought. He was the first of all things.”

—From Lakota elder interviews obtained by James R. Walker between 1896 and 1914, edited by Raymond DeMallie and Elaine Jahner, 1980, p. 102; parenthetical words have been added for clarity

At the very crest of Porcupine Butte, a young Oglala boy was marking the end of his thirteenth winter of life by performing his *hambeday*, or Spirit Quest. He had been named Caske by his father, Rolling Thunder, when he was only a few days old, Caske being the usual Lakota name for a first-born son. Now, with his coming of age and the changing of his voice to re-

seem that of a man, it was time to learn his spiritual identity, and perhaps his future role in the tribe, whether as a scout, a hunter, or perhaps even as a warrior. He was dressed in a breechcloth and moccasins, with only a robe to wrap around him, and had carried no food or water with him. Since the sunset of two days previously, he had sat erect, defiantly facing the frigid north wind as the stars swirled overhead through the long night, and a cool early spring sun brought scant daytime warmth to his lean and small body.

During the endless night, Caske watched the starry sky, gazing at the group of seven stars that were arranged in the shape of a long-handled spoon as they slowly revolved around the *wakan* star, the star that never moves. He knew that these seven stars symbolized the seven campfires of the Dakota Nation, which were spread out across the most distant plains to the north, almost all the way to the land of the Spirit of the North Wind, *Waziyata*. He also knew from what his grandfather had told him that the filmy spray of stars that spilled out of the cup and was strewn across the entire vault of the heavens from north to south like a nebulous road was the very pathway that human spirits follow when they leave this earth. Along the way are several especially bright stars, marking the campfires of those spirits who are still walking the spirit road and who have stopped to rest for a time. Only a few winters previously his father's spirit had begun to follow this trail to its end beyond the pine forests at the southern edge of the earth, after he froze to death

during an extended hunt in fruitless search of a wandering winter herd of the buffalo, *tatanka*. When he finally reached the southern end of the spirit road, it would always be warm, and flowers would always be in bloom.

Now, as the sun was rising in the gradually reddening east, Caske chanted a wordless song to himself, rocking slowly back and forth and trying to forget his painfully cold body and sharp hunger pangs. The distant hills seemed to dance in rhythm as he moved, and when he looked to the west he could barely see where the rising sun struck the faintly visible *Paha Sapa*, the sacred, densely forested hills of his forefathers. This was the summer home of the vast herds of *tatanka*, who even now were slowly moving north from their wintering grounds far to the south, along the meandering Platte River, the *Pankeska Wakpa*.

Caske could look down in the early morning light and see that the men in his village's campground beside the small creek were now preparing for the buffalo hunt. Joining with other Oglala groups, they would soon intercept the herds as they moved through a narrow gap (*Pte Tali Yapa*) in the hills at the southern tip of the *Paha Sapa*. With luck, he would be invited to participate in the great hunt soon, at least after he was able to prove his own bravery and horsemanship to the older men.

At each sunrise and sunset Caske stood up and followed a traditional ritual that he had learned from his grandfather. Taking his father's stone pipe with his left

hand, he lifted it to his mouth. Standing erect, facing each of the four directions in turn, he waved the tip of the pipe in a small circle as he inhaled, and blew a puff of smoke in each direction. First he faced the west, the most important of all the directions, and the most powerful or *wakan* direction. Toward the west, *wiyohipeyata*, rose the sacred *Paha Sapa* hills, now becoming a faint blue line as the rising sun struck them more fully. Still farther to the west lived *Wiyohipeyata*, Spirit of the Rain, whose summer storms brought green grass and who also provided a permanent home to the Thunderbird, giver of lightning and thunder, and to the swallow, whose forked tail is symbolic of lightning. The west is also where the great spotted eagle came from, and indeed where all animal nations were created. Somewhere hidden in the *Paha Sapa* was a great windy cave from which the ancestral Dakota first emerged, and also where *tatanka* once sprang forth to populate the prairies and to feed the Dakota Nation.

Caske then turned to face the north. Toward the north, *waziata*, were the dry, grassless lands that had but few rivers, like the Bad River, *Wakpasice*, whose waters were far too bitter and muddy to drink. The north is also the home of *anunkasan*, the white-headed eagle, and of *hinhan*, the great white owl of the snow. The north is also the home of *Waziya*, Spirit of the North Wind, and of the winter season, *waniyetu*. Strongest of all the winds, this wind was by far the most dangerous to the Lakota Nation and also to all the Animal Nations, for it could turn living flesh into

icy stone in a very short time. *Waziya* is greatly feared by the Lakota, as it has no pity and will kill their children. *Waziya* sometimes appears as a human dressed in wolf skin. He is always at war with the south wind and with *Inyan*, the Spirit of the Rocks.

Turning next toward the east, *iwiyo hiyanpata*, Caske could see endless stretches of prairie, rolling far away in the direction of the great river of muddy water, *Minose Wakpa*. Caske's ancestors had first crossed this wide and dangerous river many generations before. There they had carved out their vast prairie empire in a place far removed from the strange and powerful white-skinned people, the *wasica wakan*, whom Caske had only heard about around the campfire, but who were said to carry magical sticks that could kill at much greater distances than any arrow could fly. The east is also the home of *Wiyohiyampa*, Spirit of the East Wind and giver of light and goodness, who aids in the movements of the life-giving sun. The East Wind Spirit was sometimes called upon to help the sun to rise from its bed each day and oversee the world. The Spirit of the East Wind was vitally important in the ritual Sun Dance that proves a Lakota's personal bravery and spiritual purity, and also in the Buffalo Ceremony that is needed to bring the *tatanka* near so that they can be hunted easily.

Turning clockwise once again, Caske finally faced the south, *itokaga*, where a dark line of pine trees ridged the distant horizon. Beyond these forests lay *Nahuga Hohpi Wakpala*, the Niobrara River, where in

the summer he and his family often traveled to catch fish, to hunt the agile deer with the black-tipped tail, *tahcha*, and to swim in the river's cooling waters. The south is also the home of the Spirit of the South Wind, *Okaga*, the giver of warmth and wisdom. Soon *Okaga* would wrest control of the world from the powerful north wind *Waziyata*, would waken the grass and flowers with its warm breezes, and would tell all the Bird Nations to return and begin to nest. Caske had already seen a small flock of snow-white geese heading northward as he sat on the hilltop, their wavering formation following the winding course of Wounded Knee Creek. He wondered if the geese would provide him with some clue indicating that perhaps they would become his Spirit Guide. He hoped the geese might even circle back, but they were soon far out of sight, leaving him alone and disappointed.

Caske meditated in turn on each of these directions and their resident spirits. He especially thought about *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Spirit, and the source of all that is mysterious in this world. Caske silently gave thanks for his family, his spotted pony, the great herds of *tatanka* that were finally returning after a long winter, and for his own good health. He almost forgot how cold and hungry he was as he tried to grasp the thought of the infinite power of *Wakan Tanka*.

As he turned back to the east and stared intently at the rising sun, the visible world slowly seemed to swim about him, as if he were at its very center, and the clouds overhead gathered directly above him.

Then, there was a shrill call from high above, in fact a series of loud yipping notes, like distant horseback-mounted warriors calling encouragement to one another as they rode into battle. Looking up, Caske saw an eagle circling high overhead with a large animal clutched firmly in its talons. Its golden neck feathers gleamed in the sun, and the white patches on its wings and tail looked almost transparent against the sky. In his dazed condition Caske closed his eyes and felt himself rising into the sky as well, the land below falling away, and his gaze reaching farther, all the way to the *Paha Sapa* in the west, and to a great river that he had never before actually seen to the east. He saw the circle of tipis of his relatives beside the winding creek below, a group of tethered ponies in a nearby meadow, and thought he could faintly hear his mother calling out to him.

As he rose ever higher with his arms outstretched like the eagle's wings, watching the eagle and its prey, Caske suddenly realized that, like the eagle, he too had something clinging to one of his moccasins. Fearful at first that it might be a snake, he glanced down and saw a furry animal, looking something like the small white-tailed rabbit *mastinsapa*, but with short ears and a short, black-tipped tail, fearfully hanging onto his moccasins with its front claws. He knew he had seen such animals before, usually peering out of burrows in the prairies. Then the animal lost its grip on his moccasin and fell away. As it approached the ground, it suddenly divided into two, then four, then many. As

each animal struck the ground, a burrow suddenly appeared, so that dozens of holes were soon scattered about in the grass, like a cluster of tipis.

Caske looked up and saw both the eagle and the white cloud above it grow smaller, the eagle and cloud both finally disappearing from sight. He gradually became aware that he was now back on earth, still holding his father's pipe, and shivering from excitement. Collecting his wits, he began to run down the steep slope while singing to himself, often stumbling in his haste. As he ran past the village group of tethered horses, his spotted pony whinnied a greeting at him, but Caske didn't even pause. Running to the head tipi, he quickly blurted out his vision to the shaman, who listened carefully.

"Does this mean that I will become a warrior with the strength of the spotted eagle?" Caske anxiously asked. The shaman replied, "No, you can only hope someday to acquire the spotted eagle's courage. If you ever prove yourself to be heroic in battle, you might hope to be granted the honorary name *Wamblikesa*, Spotted Eagle. For now, you will be called Whistling Squirrel, *Pispiza*. Whistling squirrels live together in peace in large villages on the prairie, and they alertly warn one another of all kinds of danger by calling out a loud *pispiza!*, the exact signal depending on whether the enemy is the snake *sintehla*, the coyote *mashlecha*, or the swift hawk *wakinyaha*. The *pispiza* can easily tell all of its enemies apart, and will send different signals to its friends so they will know just how close and

how dangerous the animal is, and how it might attack. You must train yourself to be very alert to the entire world, and study both the Bird and Animal Nations, and learn all the stories that they will tell you if you watch and listen closely.”



Bison bellowing

Chapter 2

May 1850: The Moon of Shedding Ponies

“Over the whole earth they are coming,
The buffalo are coming,
the buffalo are coming,
The crow has brought the message
to the tribe
The father says so, the father says so.”

—Song of the Lakota Ghost Dance

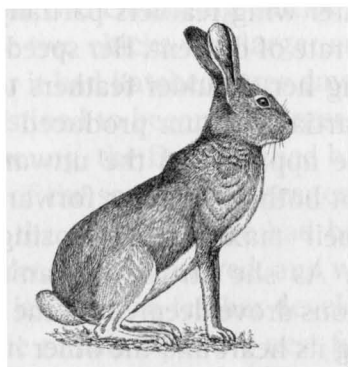
The female golden eagle swept on northward, having seen but scarcely paid attention to the crest of Porcupine Butte where it had seen the boy sitting a few weeks before. It was at the eastern edge of its immense home range, which extended north to the White River badlands and west to Slim Butte, about thirty miles to the west of Porcupine Butte. Slim Butte, although somewhat lower than Porcupine Butte, was steep-sided and isolated. It provided a wonderful panoramic view that extended south to the Pine Ridge, westward to the bluish ridge marking the edge of the Black Hills, and north over the vast grasslands to the

far horizon. The butte's southern face offered an ideal nesting site, protected from the cold early spring winds of the north, but catching the warming sun's rays on the butte's southern slopes during early daylight hours.

The eagle's enormous nest, built over a nearly twenty-year period, had been started when the four-year-old female first reached adulthood. Since then, she and her current mate had shared the nest site, for the past ten years. A rattlesnake had killed her first mate when its talons had struck the snake too far back, and in a reflex stabbing response the snake had delivered a fatal bite. That summer the female failed to raise any young, for she could not find enough food to sustain both herself and her two chicks, and both nestlings had starved. Within a year she had acquired a new mate, a male that had just attained full adulthood. Smaller by about three pounds than the female, he nonetheless had been a superb forager for the incubating and brooding female. By mid-May, The Moon of Shedding Ponies, the pair was caring for a brood of two well-feathered youngsters.

Nearly a month old, the chicks needed to remain in the nest another six weeks, prior to their first flight. Even then they would be dependent upon their parents for food for the rest of the summer, as the techniques of catching fleeing rabbits require so much skill that few young eagles can master them quickly enough to avoid starvation. As the young became increasingly feathered and able to remain warm without the female's brooding them, both the male and female spent

much of their daylight hours foraging over the freshly greening short-grass prairies. Prairie dogs and cottontail rabbits were their most common prey, but the female was always on the alert for unwary jackrabbits, which offered far more food, although an adult jackrabbit represented a heavy load for even the twelve-pound female to haul back to the nest.



The female coursed upwind toward the northwest, crossing the White River and heading into the badlands, an ideal habitat for jackrabbits. It is also a perfect topography for hunting them, as the hills make high-speed level-ground runs by the rabbits more difficult, and the irregular topography is well suited for gliding in unseen from behind a rise. The wind was gently blowing out of the northwest, and the late morning sun was shining diagonally down on the eagle's back, making her downward and forward vision especially sharp, and nearly blinding the view of a rabbit looking up toward the southern sky.

Soon the eagle saw a jackrabbit crouching by a clump of sand sage, chewing on its newly growing spring leaves. It was the black-tailed kind, not the larger white-tailed, which would be too heavy for even a large female golden eagle to carry very far. Setting her wings, the eagle began a shallow dive, keeping her shadow almost in line with the nearly motionless rabbit, and her outer wing feathers partially drawn back to increase her rate of descent. Her speed gradually increased, causing her shoulder feathers to rise and vibrate in the partial vacuum produced by her airfoil outline. As she approached the unwary rabbit, she silently brought both of her legs forward and opened her toes to their maximum, exposing eight long, curved talons. As she struck the animal, her two longest rear talons drove deeply into the rabbit's flank, one penetrating its heart and the other its lungs, while the rabbit's body was knocked to the ground. Now spreading her two great wings over the rabbit she lowered them to the ground to prevent any possible escape.

After a minute or so, the rabbit's death struggles ceased. The eagle faced into the wind and made a hopping take-off with one foot, using the other to clutch her prey, its four-pound weight adding greatly to her efforts to become airborne. But the wind soon caught the underside of her pinions, and the eagle slowly gained altitude. When she had ascended several hundred feet, she turned to the southwest and began following the course of the White River. Within an hour

she could see the outline of Slim Butte to the west of the river, and made a slight course correction to the right. As she approached the nest, she uttered a series of yelping notes to alert the male of her return and to catch the attention of her two hungry youngsters. Then she swooped into the nest and began tearing up the carcass and distributing it, piece by piece, into the mouths of the two clamoring chicks.

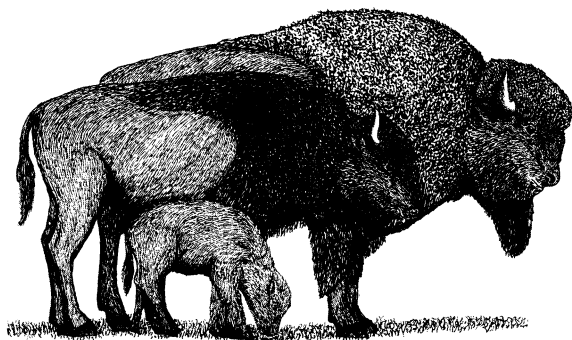
One of the two chicks was larger and stronger than the other, for it had hatched three days earlier and was a female, destined to become a larger bird. When both were quite young, the first-hatched bird had managed to get most of the sometimes-meager food brought to the nest, so the younger male had been in danger of starvation. Yet, it had survived, and was slowly catching up with its sister in feather development.

The female remained at the nest for the rest of the day, while the male brought in a prairie dog it had taken at the large colony only a few miles from their nesting site, which would be saved for an early morning feed. That night she brooded the two young, as the temperature plunged shortly after sunset. The male spent the night on a nearby crag, where he could watch both the nest and its surroundings.

The next morning the female left as soon as the warming temperatures began to offer promise of thermal updrafts, heading out into the wind in the general direction of the Black Hills. From 1,000 feet above the prairie, she could see the tracks of a great bison herd heading north and, in the distance, a slowly moving

PART I: THE LĀKOTA SPIRIT WORLD (1850)

blackish band on the far horizon. As she approached, she saw the bison herd being harassed from behind by prairie wolves. The bison at the rear edge of the group was milling about uncertainly as the adult females tried to protect and stay in close contact with their copper-colored calves, who were now only a week old. Nevertheless, the wolves kept circling a group of a dozen females and young that they had managed to isolate from the main herd, and suddenly set them into a panic-driven stampede.



At the head of the fleeing bison were the older females, followed just behind by the adult males, either because they were slower than the smaller and more agile females or were attempting to protect them. Behind the older males were the youngsters, ranging from nearly mature four- and five-year-olds through short-horned two- and three-year olds and hornless yearlings with coats of newly acquired and luxuriant blackish hair. Trailing behind all of these were the cin-

namon-colored youngsters, most less than a month old, and weighing only about thirty to forty pounds.

Soon the fate of one of the slowest youngsters was sealed, for as rapidly as it fell behind the rest, it was quickly overtaken by the wolves, and was surrounded by the pack and soon subdued. The eagle, watching from above, now simply wheeled about in wide circles. It was soon joined by a few turkey vultures that also had been watching the drama unfold. The birds then gradually drifted to the ground, landing a few hundred yards from the feasting wolves, content to wait for the surplus carrion that would become available after the wolves had stuffed themselves. The wolves too had young to feed, and the females ravenously gulped down great mouthfuls of flesh, to be carried back to the pack's den and regurgitated from their stomachs to feed the pups of the dominant "alpha" female.

In less than a half-hour the buffalo calf had largely been reduced almost to its bare, bony essentials. The eagle and vultures then cautiously approached, as did several magpies, two coyotes, and a swift fox. Unless very careful, the coyotes and swift fox could easily be chased down and killed by the wolves, so they were especially prone to wait until the wolves had nearly disappeared from view. The tiny swift fox in turn was heedful to avoid close contact with the substantially larger coyotes, for it was as much in danger from the coyotes as the coyotes were from the wolves. But the attraction of freely available fresh meat overcame the

inhibitions of both and, while constantly watching one another, they quickly gorged themselves and just as quickly left the scene.

As the bison group began to reassemble after the wolf chase, the adult females began to call and search about for their separated calves. The calves had nearly all been born at about the same time in late April and early May, as the herd was slowly moving north from their wintering grounds along the Republican River Valley. The bison had been regularly harassed by Native American hunters along the way, first by Pawnees along the Republican and Platte rivers, later by Cheyennes and Poncas along the upper Niobrara, and still later by Lakotas as they entered the great grasslands lying to the south and east of the Black Hills. All of these hunting parties took small numbers of bison, in a test of supreme horsemanship and raw courage that was almost as dangerous to the humans as to their prey.

In a few places having sharply eroded or rimrock topography, it was also possible for the horse-mounted Lakotas to manipulate the movements of the bison so as to cause them to approach the edge of the prairie tableland before the animals became aware of their dangerous situation. The hunters would then frighten the bison into a blind stampede, forcing them over the edges of the precipice at full gallop, where they would tumble onto the rocks below, breaking their legs or at least disabling them long enough to be dispatched.

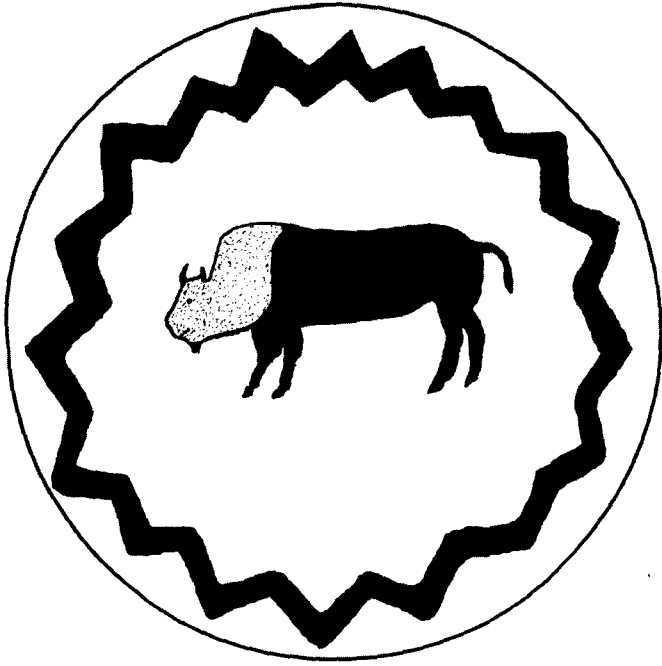
At times those bison that had been seriously hurt

but not disabled by the hunters would catch up with but gradually lag behind the migrating herd, where they became opportunistic prey of wolves. Except for these disadvantaged individuals, little heed was paid by the bison to the wolves, which often trotted close to the edge of the herd, constantly inspecting it for any signs of weakness among its members. This tolerance of nearby wolves allowed Lakota men to cover themselves in the skin of a wolf, and thereby crawl close enough to the bison herd to deliver an arrow into the nearest animal. Such a surprise attack would set the group into panic, variably scattering them. Then, horse-mounted hunters would come galloping up and attack the separated animals with their lances, arrows, and spears.

So it was that the men of Whistling Squirrel's clan were able to obtain many bison carcasses to cut up and haul back to Wounded Knee Creek, where the women would soon set about the tasks of skinning and tanning hides, and preparing the flesh for immediate eating or storage.

*"Listen, he said, yonder the buffalo are coming,
These are his sayings, yonder the buffalo are coming,
They walk, they stand, they are coming,
Yonder the buffalo are coming."*

—Lakota Buffalo Song



Dakota drum design

Chapter 3

June 1850: Pispiza and the Prairie Dogs

“The buffalo were given by the Spirit of the Earth to the Indians. The Spirit of the Earth and the buffalo are the same.”

—Short Bull, *Lakota Belief & Ritual*, by J. R. Walker, edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1991)

During the longest days of summer, Pispiza awoke every morning at sunrise and rode his pony out into the buffalo-grass pastures that the antelope (*tah-heencha*) and ponies (*sunghula*) most liked to forage in, amid the prairie dogs. The prairie dogs soon learned that neither Pispiza nor his horse posed any threat to them, and gradually came to ignore his presence. Pispiza liked to lay flat on the grass, with his head no higher than a prairie dog's, to see if he could locate an approaching coyote before the prairie dogs saw it, or perhaps catch first sight of an eagle (*huya*) or soaring hawk (*cetan*). He soon learned that many eyes and ears are far better than one, and that the prairie dogs al-

ways had at least a few of their kind standing guard, safeguarding the entire community.

Pispiza tried hard to learn the language of the prairie dogs. He soon learned that the commonest call they uttered was a sharp barking note that they used as a general antipredator call, and that the animals uttered the call only when they were close to a burrow opening. When it was uttered, all the other prairie dogs within hearing range would quickly respond by looking about, or by crouching or briefly ducking into their burrow. But the prairie dogs liked to see what was happening, and all would soon lift their heads high enough to see what might be the cause of the danger. Many of the prairie dogs would repeat the barking call as soon as they confirmed the presence of the intruder. And Pispiza eventually came to realize that different intruders, such as a coyote (*mashlecha*), hawk (*cetan*), or human (*iyunkala*), would generate slightly different warning barks. Pispiza also recognized that, over time and with enough experience, the prairie dogs adjusted their calls to indicate differing degrees of danger.

Among other calls that Pispiza learned to recognize was a rasping sound made when the animals were having territorial or mating disputes, and that sometimes preceded an attack. At close range, Pispiza could hear that prairie dogs sometimes growled or chattered their teeth when they were very angry and likely to attack one another. Pispiza sometimes also heard a purring sound coming from deep in the burrow, but could never learn what it might mean.

The call that Pispiza most liked to hear was the one that the prairie dogs uttered at various times, but often after some danger had just passed and the animals could relax. It also occurred when an animal was having a dispute with a neighbor that suddenly was resolved. Often it happened when the prairie dog would run to its burrow and pause briefly at its entrance. Then it would suddenly jump upwards and backwards on its hind legs, with its front legs lifted up as if it were trying to catch something in the air, and simultaneously utter a sharp whistled "weee." Then it would quickly return to its four-footed posture as it uttered a soft, breathy "oh!" Seeing or hearing this call usually caused many of the nearby prairie dogs to make the same response, almost looking as if they were all applauding a suddenly safer situation. Pispiza sometimes practiced this call and posture himself, but he was never able to get any prairie dogs to respond in the same way. He finally decided to call this behavior the *jo agan ihapya* or whistle-jump.

Pispeza observed that whistle-jumping might be performed by a prairie dog of either sex and of almost any age, but all those that Pispiza judged to be females performed the behavior much less than males, and young animals the least of all. As Pispiza watched his colony of prairie dogs, he gradually came to recognize that some of the animals almost never did the whistle-jump, and others much more frequently than most, in the same way he had learned that some people are much more expressive than others. From his prairie

dog observations, he judged that some people likewise are probably more observant and much more objective sources of information about judging possibly dangerous situations than others. He also learned that he should seek information from as many people as possible before coming to a conclusion. He never knew that these simple observations on prairie dogs would eventually make him a great judge of people, and a great Oglala warrior.



During these long summer days on the prairie, Pispiza came to learn the calls of other animals, and to recognize the songs of all the birds he saw. Occasionally small herds of buffalo would wander past him as he lay stretched out in the grass, paying him little heed as they grazed on the abundant new growth stimulated by the digging and fertilizing behavior of the prairie dogs.

One day Pispiza's long and patient observations gave him an idea as to how he might be able to stalk animals even as large as a buffalo. He had observed

that the buffalo paid little attention to a lone coyote or wolf, but the sight of a human on horseback or even approaching on foot would cause them to bolt and run. He got permission from his grandfather to borrow the pelt of a wolf that was being used as a bed blanket in their tipi. Using some rawhide thongs, he was able to tie its legs over his own arms and legs, so that his entire small body was almost wholly hidden from view when he got down on all fours. Then, holding his bow and with a half-dozen arrows in his quiver, he carefully approached the prairie-dog town on foot. The prairie dogs easily recognized him, and paid no attention as he laid down on the grass in a posture resembling a sleeping wolf.

In this sleeping-wolf posture, Pispiza almost fell asleep, but was roused when he heard the distinct snuffling sounds of buffalo. Lifting his head enough to peer out over the grass, he saw a small group of female buffalo and their two-month-old copper-colored calves slowly approaching. The females kept their heads low, feeding continuously as they came, while the calves tried to keep under the bellies of their mothers, suckling whenever they had a chance.

Pispiza again lowered his head, trembling with excitement. His parents had not had fresh buffalo meat for many months. The great herds were still widely scattered and far to the north, and there would be no hunting parties organized until the grasses began to turn brown and the herds started on their southward migration. And, of all the kinds of buffalo meat, that

of young calves was the most tender.

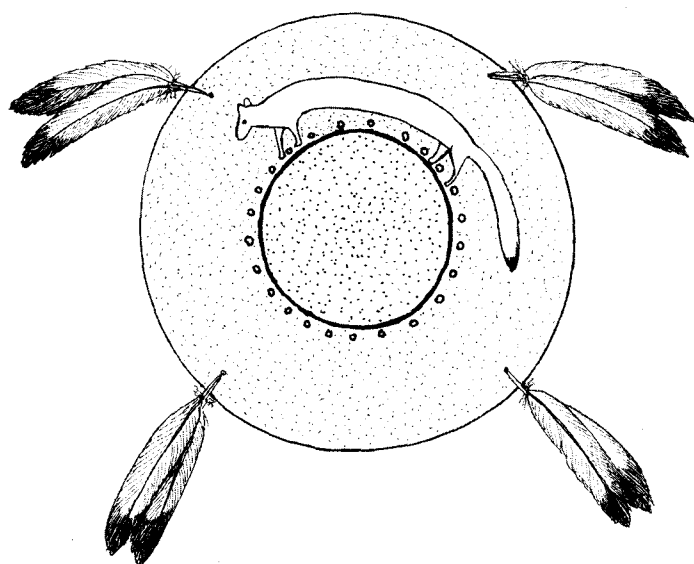
After what seemed almost forever, Pispiza again cautiously lifted his head, and could see that the nearest cow buffalo had two calves beside her, and they were no more than forty yards away. Very slowly, and very quietly, Pispiza selected the arrow with the largest stone point he had and notched it into the bowstring. Then, even more slowly, he drew back the string as far as his strength would allow. Given the distance, and only a slight west wind in his face, he decided he should aim slightly above the nearest calf's shoulder and need not worry about any wind correction.

The taut bowstring made a slight humming sound as the arrow was released. It carried straight and true, striking the calf between two of its forward ribs and below its shoulder blade. It pierced the heart, so that the calf was able to run for only a short distance before it staggered and fell. As Pispiza stood up, the other buffalo panicked, and fled as rapidly as they could.

Pispiza was both elated and distressed at what he had just accomplished. Now his family would have enough fresh meat to last for weeks, and the calf's beautiful hide would make a wonderfully warm blanket for his bed. Its sinews could be made into thread and bowstrings; its bones into knives, arrowheads, and tools; and nearly all of its other parts used for something.

Before he touched the dead calf, Pispiza said a blessing for its spirit, then ran back to his parents' tipi to get help and tell them of his exploit. With time, word of it

would pass through the village, and Pispiza's reputation as a keen observer and hunter would gradually grow.



Dakota shield design

Chapter 4

July 1850: A Prairie Dog Summer

Tatu Wakan is all that is mysterious. It means all things mysterious taken together. To invoke Taku Wakan is to invoke all the spirits, but especially the mightier spirits. All beasts are wakan.

—From *Lakota Myth* by James R. Walker,
edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner
(1980:101)

The prairie dogs (*pispiza*) living in the gigantic colony located near the base of Slim Butte had periodically retreated back into their holes as the great herds of bison passed by overhead on their annual trek northward. Now, the bison were simply milling about, often grazing close to the prairie-dog burrows, where freshly sprouting herbage rich in minerals had been brought near the surface by the animals' digging behavior. Now too, in the fullness of summer with an abundance of vegetation all around them, the prairie dogs spent long hours stretched out beside the en-

trances to their mounds, periodically scanning the sky for hawks and eagles, and surveying the distant horizon for coyotes and wolves.

The prairie dogs that had survived the many perils of all these predators were those that were unusually vigilant, spending much of their time scanning the entire landscape for possible trouble. These older and more experienced animals tended to have their burrows located near the center of the colony. The youngest residents were those nearest the colony's edges, who had been evicted from their parents' burrows as they approached sexual maturity, and had been forced to dig new burrows for themselves, well away from established pairs and families. Their peripheral locations made them the most likely individuals to be caught by approaching coyotes or badgers, and their inexperience sometimes led them to pay inadequate attention to the warning signals made by more attentive members of the colony.

Indeed, the colony was not a randomly distributed assortment of animals, but had a social structure something like that of a human village. The collective assemblage was basically organized by family groups, each family consisting of a mature male at least two years old, one or more adult or immature females that were rather closely related to one another, and their dependent juveniles, which by mid-summer might number up to a dozen or so. Most of the breeding females were at least two years old, but a few yearling females had also mated and produced litters of young.

Few if any females in the entire colony were as old as eight years, and there were also very few males as old as five years, because of the species' high mortality rates, especially among juveniles.

Each large family group occupied a home range or area of territorial defense up to about an acre, within which a rather complex burrow system was present. Typically each burrow had two entrances, but as many as six were sometimes present, all connected to central chambers where sleeping and breeding occurred. These burrows were sometimes up to one hundred feet long and as much as sixteen feet deep. Each of the entrances was typically surrounded by a pile of dirt, the domed entrance serving both to help keep water out during rainstorms, and providing a handy elevated point from which to scan the horizon for danger.

Whenever the adults were not occupied with foraging or other activities, at least one adult family member would stand guard at the burrow entrance, either crouching low or sitting erect on its hind legs, its forelegs then being available for food handling. Its black-tipped tail curved slightly upwards, and was often shaken nervously from side to side. At times an adult could even stretch out in the sun and relax, but such events were rare, and most sunbathing was limited to the young and foolhardy.

If any individual in the colony happened to see a potential danger, it would utter a loud, doglike barking call that would instantly alert all others within hearing range, who in turn would produce the same

general alarm call, thus rapidly spread the alarm. Barking quickly sent all the animals within earshot scurrying quickly back into the burrows, often for several minutes. Barking occurred even more often when one prairie dog was trying to avoid contact with another, as when a male approached a female and tried to “kiss” her. Females often responded to this with a softer chittering call rather than loud barking. Seemingly, the chittering was the female’s way of saying, “I’m not interested,” while the louder barking was a more emphatic “Get out!” Baby prairie dogs wanting attention from an adult other than their mother usually got the same treatment.

By mid-summer, the colony was simply alive with young prairie dogs, most of whom were now about two months old and were spending much of their daylight hours above ground. Each day they ventured out ever farther from their home burrows, eating almost any green vegetation that they encountered. They had first emerged when they were six weeks old, about a week after their eyes had opened and when their mother was beginning to wean them toward eating solid foods, such as grasses growing near the burrow. The foraging babies paid little attention to possible dangers, but instead relied on their parents, and especially their ever-watchful father, to alert them to any threats.

In one burrow located near the colony center, a four-year old male was mated to two younger females, who between the two of them had produced a total of

ten young. This brood had already been reduced by half since the two nursing females often attacked and sometimes killed the young of the other mother. This strange behavior, although difficult to imagine, probably helped to reduce future competition for limited food resources, and occasionally mothers who had lost all of their own young would become helpers, or nannies, in caring for the young of the other female.

Drawn to the sudden supply of young prairie dogs, many predators patrolled the colony, with coyotes, wolves, and badgers visiting the area every day, as well as occasional bobcats. Daytime danger also came from the skies, with ferruginous hawks and golden eagles circling silently overhead, ready to swiftly dive on any youngsters that had strayed too far from home. Much faster and even more deadly were a pair of prairie falcons, who would approach the colony almost invisibly just above ground level, and at a blazing speed far faster than a prairie dog can run. The five-ounce baby prairie dogs could easily be grabbed and carried off by these speedsters, then taken to a butte-side nest where hungry youngsters of the falcon's own were waiting.

One day a badger and two coyotes appeared simultaneously at the colony. In fact, the coyote pair simply followed the plodding badger as it made its methodical way toward the prairie dogs. Sighting a burrow where several youngsters had been scampering about, it made a beeline to the hole where they disappeared. Just as rapidly the two coyotes took up positions at the nearest other burrow entrances, and silently stood

guard there. The badger soon began ripping up the sun-baked ground around the burrow entrance, and within less than a minute had almost completely disappeared into the hole. At that point young prairie dogs began to escape via one of the other tunnel entrances, only to be pounced upon by the coyotes as rapidly as they emerged above ground. After killing and rapidly gulping down several youngsters, the coyotes ambled off, not waiting to see if the badger had also managed to obtain a meal for itself.

Life was no easier for the prairie dogs as daylight faded and dusk approached. Great horned owls, whose specialized wing feathers muffled the sounds of their wing beats, drifted in like ghosts each evening, often grabbing unwary burrowing owls as well as late-foraging prairie dogs. Evenings also brought out rattlesnakes, easily able to penetrate the dogs' complex burrow systems, and capable of tracking down hidden and helpless youngsters by detecting and homing in on their radiant body heat.

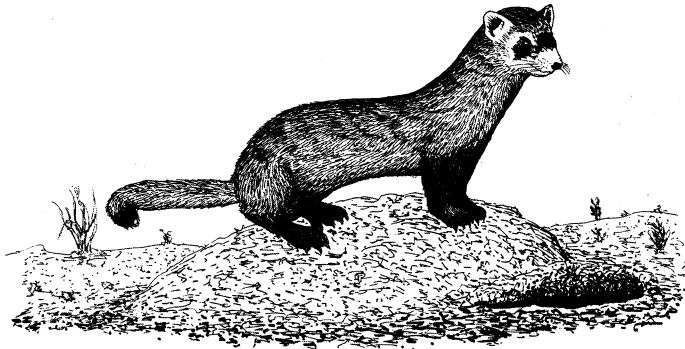
Rarely too, black-footed ferrets appeared after dark. Long-bodied and short-legged, these voracious weasels could also penetrate a prairie-dog burrow without difficulty. With the ferrets' speed and agility, even an adult prairie dog had little hope for surviving a ferret visit.

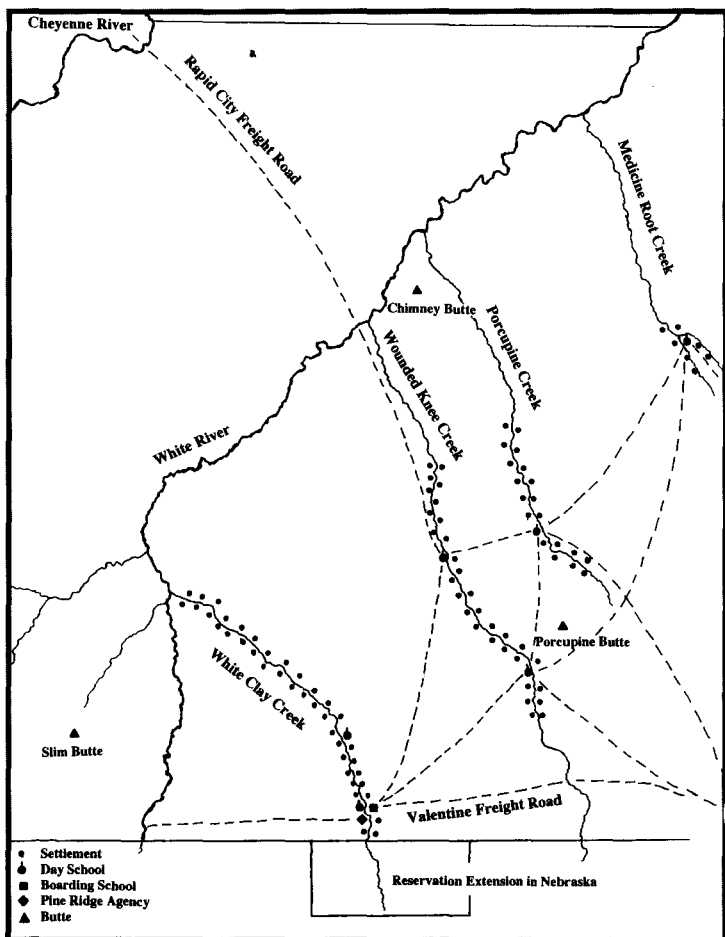
Bobcats appeared at the dog colony at any time between dusk and dawn. They would cautiously and quietly stalk across the almost barren landscape as soon as darkness approached, but by then most prairie dogs

A PRAIRIE DOG SUMMER

had retreated to their burrows. Their nocturnal vision was far better than that of wolves or coyotes, but their olfactory powers were more limited, and they were much more likely to detect kangaroo rats and pocket mice than encounter prairie dogs during their nightly hunts.

Thus the summer days slowly passed, each day bringing new experiences and new dangers to the young prairie dogs, and a gradual thinning of their numbers. But, overall, the total number of prairie dogs by the end of the summer was nearly twice that of the springtime population, and as the days began to shorten and the noontime sun began to slowly retreat southward, an indefinable sense of well-being increasingly pervaded the land.





Map of the western part of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 1884. Adapted by author from a map by Marley, 1935.

Part 2:

The Death of the Spirit World (Oglala History, 1850 – 1900)

“This is a good day to die; follow me!”

—Low Dog, Oglala Chief, at 1876
Little Bighorn Battle

After many hostile encounters with settlers, the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 was finally signed. With it, the Dakotas agreed to confine their activities to the treaty-ceded lands of the Great Sioux Reservation in exchange for promised regular rations of food, clothing, cooking utensils, and other supplies. This enormous reservation comprised all of present-day western South Dakota west of the Missouri River, including the Black Hills, and some parts of present-day Wyoming, Nebraska, and North Dakota. In exchange for gaining total control of this land, the Dakotas were thereafter excluded from their important bison hunting grounds in the Platte River Valley, where the Union

Pacific Railroad was being built and immigrants were streaming west along the Overland Trail. However, they were promised hunting access to the unceded lands of present-day eastern Wyoming and Montana, west to the Bighorn Mountains and north to the Yellowstone River.

The Dakotas suffered devastating population losses and a series of cultural disasters during the 1870s. The westward-encroaching railroads had already brought hordes of settlers and commercial bison-hunters to the Great Plains. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills in 1874 led to bitter disputes over the ownership of the Hills, and increasingly resulted in direct hostilities between the U.S. Army and the Dakotas. In a still-disputed 1876 treaty, the approximate western sixth of South Dakota, including the Black Hills, was excised from the Great Sioux Reservation, reclaimed by the U.S. government, and opened to whites for mineral exploitation and settlement. The Dakota's vast hunting grounds of eastern Wyoming and Montana were then also declared off limits to hunting. Deprived of nearly all their traditional bison-hunting grounds at a time when bison herds were becoming ever rarer, and with the loss of their beloved Black Hills, the Dakotas revolted.

In 1875 the U.S. government offered to pay the Oglalas \$6,000,000 in reparations for their loss of the Black Hills, an offer that has been repeatedly rejected. Between 1875 and 1950 a single gold mine in the Black Hills extracted over nineteen million ounces of

PART 2: THE DEATH OF THE SPIRIT WORLD (1850-1900)

gold from the Hills, an amount now worth several billion dollars. In 1980 the Dakotas were offered \$106 million for handing over the property rights to the 1.3 million areas of Black Hills lands still claimed by the federal government, but the Dakotas refused. The offer, which including interest now amounts to more than \$600 million, is still in escrow deposit with the federal government.

In 1876 the U.S. Congress passed a bill requiring that all the Dakota- and Lakota-speaking peoples move into the Great Sioux Reservation or face the termination of all government aid. Crazy Horse and his band of about 900 Oglalas subsequently surrendered at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, on May 6, 1877. He was immediately put under arrest and placed in a jail cell. In early September he was stabbed with a bayonet by an anonymous sentry and died a few hours later. His parents carried his body away and reportedly initially buried it near the Spotted Tail Indian Agency, about forty miles northeast of Fort Robinson. Later his remains were moved to a secret burial site, probably somewhere in present-day southwestern South Dakota. With the death of Crazy Horse, the Oglalas lost their greatest hero and the last vestiges of their fighting spirit.

By 1878 about 7,000 Oglalas, who had chosen to remain in the Pine Ridge area just east of the Black Hills, had occupied the Great Sioux Reservation. A somewhat smaller population of Brules settled the area around Rosebud Creek farther to the east. By 1880 the

destruction of bison for their hides, meat, and for sport had eliminated nearly all the wild bison herds from Dakota territory, effectively destroying the Dakota's ecological basis for survival. The last great buffalo hunt in present-day South Dakota occurred in 1883, when a herd of about 10,000 animals moved east out of the Black Hills toward the Cheyenne River Reservation. They were met by a combination of several hundred Dakotas, including Sitting Bull, as well as by many white hunters. The entire herd was destroyed within a few weeks.

The Great Sioux Reservation was dissolved with the Land Agreement Act of 1889 and replaced with several widely distributed reservations totaling about seven million acres in South and North Dakota. Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations were located in northwestern South Dakota and adjoining North Dakota, on the west side of the Missouri River. The Lower Brule Reservation was situated in central South Dakota, also on the west side of the Missouri. The Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations were established along the northern Nebraska border in southwestern South Dakota, in the White River and Little White River drainages.

In 1889 the Pine Ridge Reservation contained about 6,800 full-blooded and mixed-blood residents (about 25 percent being mixed-blood) and 360 whites. At least 25 percent of the total population was by then suffering from tuberculosis, partly as a result of the Lakotas having been moved from their portable tipis

into crowded, government-built wooden houses having virtually no sanitary facilities. The federal government had also reneged on prior promises to reimburse the Natives for ponies that had been confiscated from them in 1876 and to make agreed-upon improvements in educational facilities. In 1889 Congress also cut meat rations to the Indian agencies west of the Missouri, bringing the Natives to near-starvation and generating hunger-induced diseases.

The last documented Oglala Sun Dance was held in 1883, the year the federal government banned the performance of all Native ritual ceremonies such as the Sun Dance and Ghost Dance. The final Ghost Dance was performed in 1890, in the Stronghold Table of the Badlands, where the last Lakotas had held out before surrendering.

The Lakota's meager meat rations that had been promised by federal treaty were cut in half in 1889 by the federal government, partly in reprisal for some of the Plains tribes continuing to perform the illegal Ghost Dance. General John Brooke, commander of the Department of the Platte, reduced their beef ration by half a second time in November of 1890, when the two-week rations per one hundred people had until then consisted of fifty pounds of flour, ten pounds of bacon, seven pounds of sugar, five bushels of salt, four pounds of coffee, and one pound of baking powder.

The Wounded Knee massacre in South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation in late December of 1890 represented the ultimate tragedy for the Lakotas. A band of

nearly 400 Lakotas, including 120 men and 250 women and children, led by Big Foot, a Minnekonjou chief, had left the Cheyenne River Agency along the Missouri River and was heading southwest toward the Pine Ridge Agency, about 150 miles away. Carrying a white flag of truce, the Lakotas had heard they might there receive one hundred free ponies for having kept the peace, and wanted to tell Chief Red Cloud about the recent murder of Chief Sitting Bull at Standing Rock Agency.

Near Porcupine Butte they were stopped by a 500-man detachment of the Seventh Cavalry, which had been sent out from the Cheyenne River Agency's Fort Bennett to overtake and intercept them. The group consisted of two cavalry squadrons armed with Springfield carbines and Colt revolvers, and an artillery battery of four rapid-fire Hotchkiss guns firing explosive shrapnel. This was part of the same U.S. Cavalry division that had been ignominiously defeated fourteen years earlier at the Battle of Little Bighorn. By the following morning the Lakota camp had been surrounded by hundreds of riflemen and artillery. The Lakotas were then ordered to give up their few weapons, represented by about seventy guns, mostly old muzzleloaders and shotguns. Fighting suddenly broke out while the Lakotas were being searched for any additional hidden weapons, and soon turned into a maelstrom of gunfire.

Colonel James Forsyth, the officer in charge, initially reported to his superiors that ninety Lakota

“bucks” had been killed and that thirteen more had been wounded in the encounter. He didn’t mention having killed any women or children. Of the approximately 150 Lakota corpses tallied by the burial crew, 133 were listed as adults, including at least 44 women. At least twenty-three children under the age of thirteen were killed. Eighteen were young children, including seven infants and six boys, the other five presumably being young girls. One later estimate placed the total Lakota deaths at somewhere between 170 and 190. Another estimate placed the dead at 90 men and more than 200 women and children.

Twenty-five soldiers, including seven officers, died in the melee, and nearly forty were wounded. Some of the military casualties were probably the result of accidental crossfire or general incompetence by the soldiers themselves, many of whom were recent recruits and had spent much of the previous night drinking. Nevertheless, eighteen Congressional Medals of Honor were bestowed on military personnel for their actions that day, three being awarded to officers and fifteen to enlisted men.

After the smoke cleared, more than fifty Lakotas were taken to the Episcopal Mission at Pine Ridge for treatment of wounds, many of whom died soon afterwards. The majority of the wounded were women and children. An unknown number of wounded Lakotas probably hid and died in surrounding areas, remaining undetected by the burial party. Several Lakota corpses were later found in the snow, and at least four live ba-

abies were found lying wrapped in blankets pressed against their mothers' dead bodies, one having survived three days of blizzards and temperatures of far below zero.

The Wounded Knee episode was the ultimate tragedy that marked the end of the Lakota's long struggle against the whites. More broadly, it also marked the effective end to all organized Native American resistance on the northern Great Plains.

With the 1890 census, the Lakotas and other Native Americans were included in the counts, and all reservation residents who had accepted land allotments were required to adopt Christian names. Their prior adult Lakota name then became their permanent and official family surname, so that, for example, a person calling himself Little Thunder might be renamed John Little Thunder, and his son might be named Charles Little Thunder. Typically a church representative would visit a camp and ask each person what Christian name he or she wanted. If no preference was given, an interpreter would choose one at random. Americanization of Native Americans was finally underway.

Also in 1890, U.S. Indian Commissioner Thomas Morgan noted that "It is cheaper to educate an Indian than to kill him," since in 1882 his predecessor, Charles Schurz, calculated that it may have cost as much as one million dollars to kill an Indian in battle, but only twelve hundred dollars was needed to cover eight years of a child's schooling. Begun in the 1870s, federal boarding school enrollments between 1885 and 1900

increased from 6,200 in 60 schools to 17,000 in 152 schools. Children from the ages of six to fourteen were required to attend, or risk losing governmental aid for their families.

Even as late as the latter 1920s, children in these schools were being fed for an average of no more than eleven cents per day. They were severely penalized for speaking in their native languages, violent beatings were common, and extended isolation in a locked and windowless room was a frequent penalty for disobedience or attempting to escape. In government schools, classes typically occupied less than half the day, the rest being devoted to hard indoors or outdoors labor. The older boys were often sent out into the community to be used as farmhands, and the girls similarly used as domestic servants. Parents were not allowed to visit, and attendance at Christian services was required. Mental, physical, and sexual abuses of both sexes were widespread, especially at mission schools.

By 1890 the Bureau of Indian Affairs was operating eight day schools in the Pine Ridge Reservation, scattered along the four creeks (White Clay, Wounded Knee, Porcupine, and Medicine Root) where many people had settled, and had also built a boarding school at Pine Ridge village. Also by then, the Society of Jesus was operating a boarding school, the Holy Rosary Mission, at Pine Ridge village. A comparable Saint Francis Mission school was operating in the Brule's adjacent Rosebud Indian Reservation. Life for children in these mission boarding schools was even more har-

PART 2: THE DEATH OF THE SPIRIT WORLD (1850-1900)

rowing and hazardous than it was in the government-run schools.

*While there was very little real worship of God, there
existed a good deal of superstition among the Sioux.
Clever and cunning men, called medicine men,
wielded a baneful influence over the people,
making them believe they had seen visions or
had significant dreams after going through
certain rites of fasting.*

—L. J. Goll, *Jesuit Missions among the Sioux* (1940)

PART 2: THE DEATH OF THE SPIRIT WORLD (1850-1900)



Dakota shield design

Chapter 5

August 1900: Little Cottonwood and the Ghosts of Wounded Knee

“It was a terrible and horrible sight to see the women and children lying in groups, dead. Some of the young girls wrapped their heads in their shawls and buried their faces in their hands. I suppose they did that so they would not see the soldiers come up to shoot them.”

—Dr. Charles Eastman, Pine Ridge Agency

Her Lakota name was *Wagacha Cikala* (Little Cottonwood). She was fourteen winters old in 1900, and the granddaughter of Whistling Squirrel who, after he had grown up, had been given the new honorary name of Dancing Eagle for his leadership and valor in the battles against the white soldiers during the 1870s. He, together with about thirty other Dakotas and Cheyennes, had been killed during the Battle of Little Bighorn in June of 1876. Whistling Squirrel had taken

a wife, Blue Swallow, when he was still young, who in turn had produced three children. Only one, a son they named Eagle Feather, *Wiyaka Huya*, survived to adulthood, the other two children succumbing when very young to a smallpox outbreak that had been brought in by settlers.

Eagle Feather had been too young to join his father and the others during the great battles of the 1870s. He and hundreds of other Oglalas either too young or too old to fight, as well as women and the infirm, had taken refuge in the Red Cloud Agency of northwestern Nebraska, where their activities were carefully monitored by the soldiers stationed at Fort Robinson. After the death of Crazy Horse there in the fall of 1877, all of the Oglalas and Brules were force-marched under armed guard north out of Nebraska's Red Cloud Agency, headed for a newly established Great Sioux Reservation in western South Dakota. Along with Crazy Horse's grieving mother and father, and a few hundred other Oglalas, Eagle Feather returned to the land his father had loved and known best, the area around Wounded Knee Creek in the very shadow of Porcupine Butte. There he met and in 1885 married Wind Flower, *Hoksi Cekpa*. In the following spring they had a baby daughter.

Eagle Feather and Wind Flower named their daughter for the cottonwood, a tree that grew commonly along Wounded Knee Creek, and whose beautiful green leaves are not only shaped like tipis but also shimmered in the slightest wind, reminding all of the higher

powers of the Four Winds. During the fifth moon, the Moon of Shedding Ponies, the cottonwood releases its tiny seeds, to be carried on countless filaments as fine as spider webbing, the seeds drifting widely and scattering over the four directions as lightly as the down of eagle feathers. Additionally, the cottonwood's inner bark could be easily stripped, and served as adequate food for horses during periods of near-starvation. The cottonwood's Lakota name, *wagacha*, means "to take off wood," and refers to this very useful feature of the cottonwood tree. Only the cottonwood was acceptable for making the sacred central pole of the ritual Sun Dance, the most important of all Oglala religious ceremonies.

During the final moon of 1890, the Moon of Deer Antlers Shedding, winter came early to Wounded Knee. Little Cottonwood was then scarcely more than four winters old, and her mother dressed her in the family's warmest skins they owned, of wolves and otters. The bison that they had depended upon for both food and warm blankets were now becoming only distant memories, and wild game was very scarce. At times porcupines could be found among the pine trees and easily killed, and their quills were valuable to use for clothing decorations.

The Lakotas had been forced to leave the Red Cloud Agency with only the possessions they had been able to carry on their own backs and those of their horses. These usually included some cooking utensils, axes, canvas tipi covers, and spare clothing. They had nec-

essarily abandoned their heaviest possessions, such as their buffalo robes and skins used for covering their tipis. To get their monthly food rations, Eagle Feather and Wind Flower periodically had to walk or go by horseback over the twelve miles to Pine Ridge Agency, and get back again over the hilly landscape before dark.

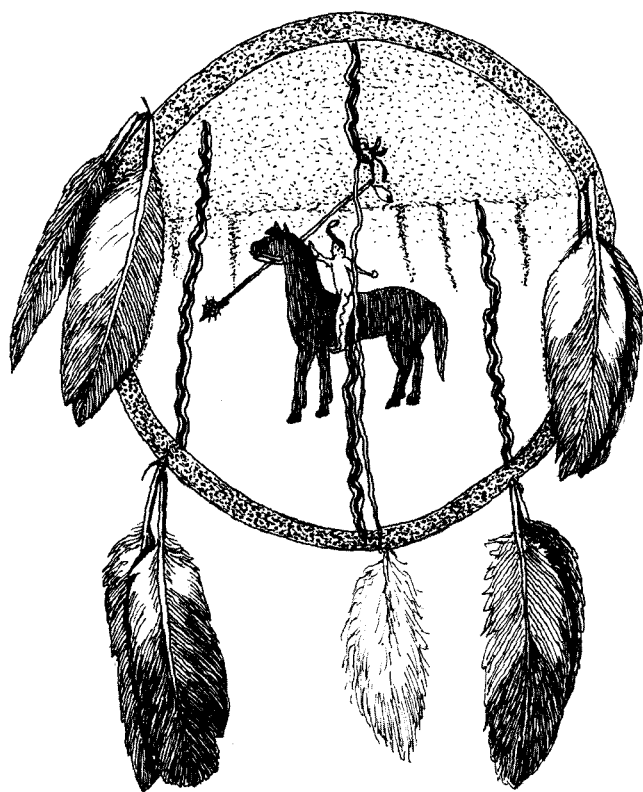
On the day before the Wounded Knee massacre, Wind Flower and Little Cottonwood had gone out to gather a supply of wood for their tipi fire from near the crest of Porcupine Butte, where many dead pine branches could easily be found. They saw the long row of soldiers approaching along the creek and decided it would be safer to make a small campfire on the butte than to return to where their tipi was located, along the creek bottom. Eagle Feather had left some days before to search the hills for elk or deer tracks in the newly fallen snow, as their winter supplies of agency-provided beef were running very low.

The next morning, Wind Flower and Little Cottonwood were awakened to the sudden sounds of rifle and machine-gun fire, and stared out at a scene so horrific as to become instantly imprinted for life on Little Cottonwood's young mind. Amid the sounds of wild screams, women and children were running for their lives toward the protective sheltering brush along Wounded Knee Creek, usually only to be shot down before reaching cover. After the initial deafening volleys, periodic gunshots could be heard as the soldiers located hidden Lakotas and shot them as they lay qui-

etly on the ground. Soon the waters of Wounded Knee Creek were tinted red with blood.

Wind Flower clutched Little Cottonwood to her chest, hiding her face from the terrible scene and preventing her from also screaming out. The acrid smell of gunpowder burned their noses, and the whimpers and cries for help from the wounded occasionally reached their ears, but they were too frightened to respond.

Hours later, as they carefully descended from Porcupine Butte, Wind Flower and Little Cottonwood began to see the limp bodies of friends being picked up and dumped in a large mule-drawn cart. By now, even the soldiers had realized the insanity of their actions, and stared dumbly at Wind Flower and Little Cottonwood as they came out of the woods at the base of Porcupine Butte and silently headed toward their bullet-torn tipi.



Dakota shield design

Chapter 6

September 1900: Little Cottonwood at the Mission School

"...gathered from the cabin, the wickiup, and the teepee, partly by cajolery and partly by threats; partly by bribery and partly by force, they are induced to leave their kindred and enter these schools and take upon themselves the outward appearance of civilization."

—Annual Report of the Department of Interior's
Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1901

The aspen and cottonwood leaves along Wounded Knee Creek were turning golden when the recently established Indian Police visited Wind Flower. She was told that Little Cottonwood must again return with them to the Holy Rosary Mission, which had been erected in 1888 by German Jesuits a short distance north of Pine Ridge village. The principal goals of such Catholic Indian missions were not to provide a useful education and associated survival skills, but instead to wrest the children away from their traditional tribal

values and inculcate them with Christian concepts and practices.

The Pine Ridge Reservation also had a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school in Oglala as well as numerous day schools scattered across the reservation. Most of the day schools were poorly heated one-room shacks with dirt floors. At the Oglala boarding school the boys were taught farming and vocational skills, while the girls were taught sewing, cooking, and other household skills. Some academic subjects such as reading and writing in English were also taught, but the speaking of Lakota was forbidden, and its use resulted in harsh punishment. All Lakota children were required to attend school, on threat of having their families' food rations cut off.

From the time they were six until they were fourteen years old, all the Catholic boys and girls living in the Pine Ridge Reservation were held virtually captive at the Holy Rosary Mission for all but a few weeks each year, when they might be allowed to go home and see their family for a short time. For up to nine years they were treated more like slaves than students. Immediately after their initial arrival the children would be stripped naked and bathed with rubbing alcohol, to make certain they had been disinfected. Their hair would be cut short and all their native clothing taken away, along with any amulets or trinkets that they were wearing. The boys were given uniforms consisting of patent-leather shoes, high-collar shirts, heavy jackets, and trousers; the girls were forced to wear

white blouses, dresses, and high-button shoes.

Each day began an endless cycle of arising at 6 a.m., kneeling and praying for an hour, then spending the rest of the day scrubbing the floors, attending classes, and working in the kitchen. Their foods were a dreary mixture of cornmeal mush, oatmeal, rice, and old if not rotten meat, while the nuns and priests dined on a varied mixture of meats, vegetables, and potatoes. At night the children slept in sex-segregated rooms that held up to fifty beds, and the doors were locked to prevent any attempts at escape. Violations of the strict rules of mission schools were dealt with severely. The youngest children were the ones most likely to suffer abuse, especially if their parents were dead or lived far away. Typically the nuns beat the girls, sometimes with a buggy whip. Or, the girls had to walk a gauntlet, their classmates being required to beat them with belts or sticks. The boys were generally beaten by priests or the principal, usually with leather straps or wooden boards around which tape had been wound. Sometimes the children had to hold heavy books with their arms outstretched, or kneel on the floor with their knees resting on broomsticks. After a beating, the offending child was sometimes placed in a windowless attic for a week or more, with only bread and water to sustain life.

Little Cottonwood endured these humiliations stoically, remembering that nothing could match her horrendous memories of Wounded Knee. She also remembered the words of her mother, Windflower, that

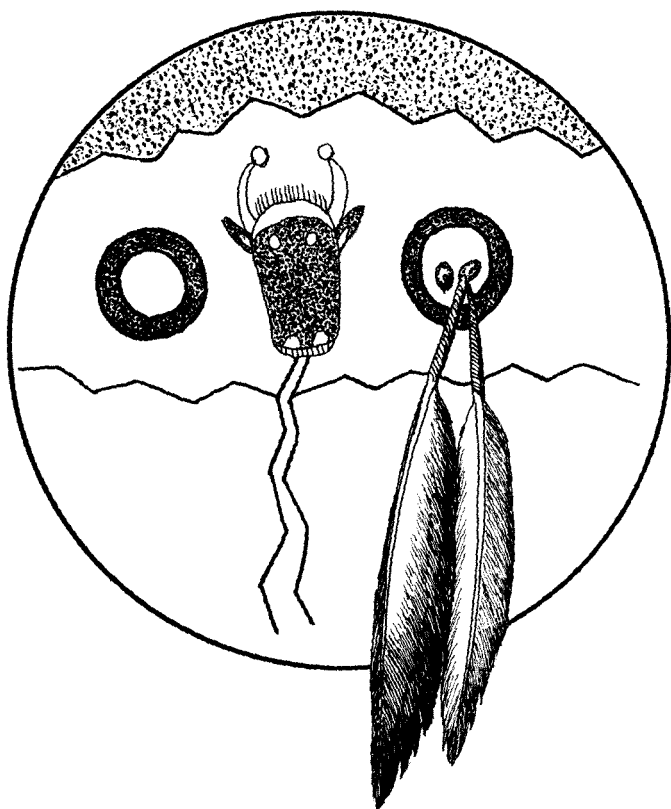
she would always be protected by *Wakan Tanka* and should be as courageous as her grandfather Spotted Eagle had been in his battles with the white soldiers. One day she secreted under her dress a white washcloth that had been torn and discarded by the nuns. That night, under the light of a full autumn moon, she began to carefully work it into a doll, using a needle that she had found on the floor and thread that she extracted from her tattered dress. Also using the needle, she pricked her finger, and with a few drops of her blood she made a simple face design on the doll's head. Within a day or so the dried blood had turned to a rusty brown, approaching the color of her own skin. Before going to sleep each night she would hold the doll tightly to her chest, silently chanting a prayer to *Wakan Tanka* that her mother had taught her. On waking in the morning she would carefully hide the doll under her blanket, knowing that if it were ever found, she would surely be beaten and the doll would be taken away and burned.

At night, as she tried to sleep, Little Cottonwood would remember her life beside Porcupine Butte, clutching her doll and wondering if her family missed her. By day, she would sometimes have a chance to briefly look out the mission windows and see the distant outline of Porcupine Butte some fifteen miles away, lying along the northeastern horizon. The land between was a rolling carpet of buffalo grass and grama grass, now almost daily turning from green to brownish as the frosts of autumn became bolder. The

grasses were interrupted by scattered dark green pines that seemed to stand guard over the prairies, and that Little Cottonwood imagined to be the spirits of her ancestors watching over her.

"Let Jesus save you." "Come out of your blanket, cut your hair, and dress like a white man." "Go to church often and regularly." "Believe that property and wealth are signs of divine approval." "Speak the language of your white brother." "Do not go to Indian dances or to the medicine men."

—Instructions from a list provided to Lakota children by missionaries at St. Francis Mission School, Rosebud Reservation (from *Lakota Woman*, by Mary Crow Dog & R. Erdoes, 1990)



Dakota shield design

Chapter 7

October 1900: The Moon of Falling Leaves

"Everything has a tonwan (spiritual essence). Wakan Tanka is the tonwan of all spirits. Red is the color that spirits like best. Blue they like also. And they like yellow, or brownish yellow. They like all colors but they like these best."

—From *Lakota Myth* by James R. Walker, edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1980:108); parenthetical insert added for clarity

By the tenth full moon of the year, the colors of the scattered aspens and cottonwoods were alive with shimmering golden hues, and the scarlet leaves of sumacs burned brightly along the creek bottoms and woodland edges. The noonday sun had finally lost its ability to wilt the leaves of water-hungry plants, or to force the deer and antelope to seek out shady places. These animals were now becoming restless and feeling a renewed urge to find mates and reproduce.

There were no more bison to be seen or heard on the prairies now, but a few bighorn sheep still survived in the remote Badlands at the northern edge of the Pine Ridge. The last wolf in the new state of South Dakota had been hunted down and shot by white cattle ranchers several years before, as had many of the mountain lions. Instead of wolf howls on moonlit nights, the yipping calls of coyotes could now be heard. The coyotes had quickly responded to the elimination of wolves by greatly increasing in numbers, soon becoming the major large mammal predator on the short-grass plains.

The pronghorns were now all in their prime, having mostly fed on freshly growing grasses and herbs all summer rather than their usual winter diet of bitter sage leaves. The females had mostly reassembled into all-female groups after having separated and given birth to their young in early spring. The young, who had nearly all been born as twins during the fourth moon of the year, were now approaching full sizes. The young females had stayed with their mothers, but the juvenile males were beginning to break their maternal attachments and starting to associate with the bachelor herds of yearling males. These yearling animals were gradually developing the black horns and blackish upper nose and lower cheek marking that denote adult maleness in the species.

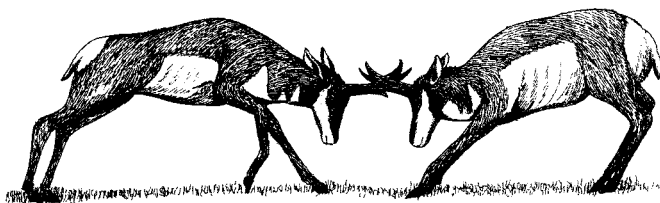
At this same autumn period, two-year-old males were coming into their first full rutting period, and in order to participate fully, a male must be willing to

stake out a personal mating territory, forcibly evicting all other males and trying to attract females within its boundaries. A good territory is one that may be an area of one or two square miles, with a reliable source of both food and water, especially nutritious fall forage, excellent visibility in all directions, and varied topography. A single male cannot constantly patrol such a large area, so he deposits a variety of visual and olfactory signposts around it. Adult male pronghorns have strong scent glands located on the sides of their cheeks, as well as rump glands that release a pungent smell when the long white hairs surrounding the tail are erected in alarm or excitement. In establishing and marking their territories, the males often stopped to rub their cheeks on small bushes, leaving a long-lasting mark of their passing. They also frequently paused long enough to lower their heads and finally urinate and defecate to more clearly mark the spot.

Once a territory was successfully established, all other males were threatened whenever they approached, and were quickly evicted if possible. Whenever another male approached, it would initially be met with prolonged and intense hostile stares. These stares were often followed by frontal and lateral posturing with erected mane and rump hair and a lowered head, and sometimes tentative threat charges. If all else failed, horn-to-horn wrestling matches were used to try force intruders off the territory. At times one of the opponents actually gored the other, often leading to lasting injuries or sometimes even death.

PART 2: THE DEATH OF THE SPIRIT WORLD (1850-1900)

However, the branched horns helped to keep the two males' heads wedged in place, and therefore unable to damage one another's vital organs. Furthermore, the skin on the males' head and neck—areas most likely to be impaled—is especially thick, reducing the chances of skin penetration.



The approach of a female led to very different behavior on the part of the male. All the females were allowed to wander about the male's territory at will. At that time the females seemed edgy, and would be inclined to dash off at the male's approach, only to re-enter the male's territory at some later time. By testing the responses of different males, the females had a way of judging relative male strength and vigor, and they gravitated to those males that were obviously the more dominant ones. By this means, a few males managed to gather in and control up to a dozen or more females, while other, less experienced males were unable to attract any.

As each female was gathered into a male's harem, he would investigate her daily to determine her state of mating readiness by smelling her genitals and some-

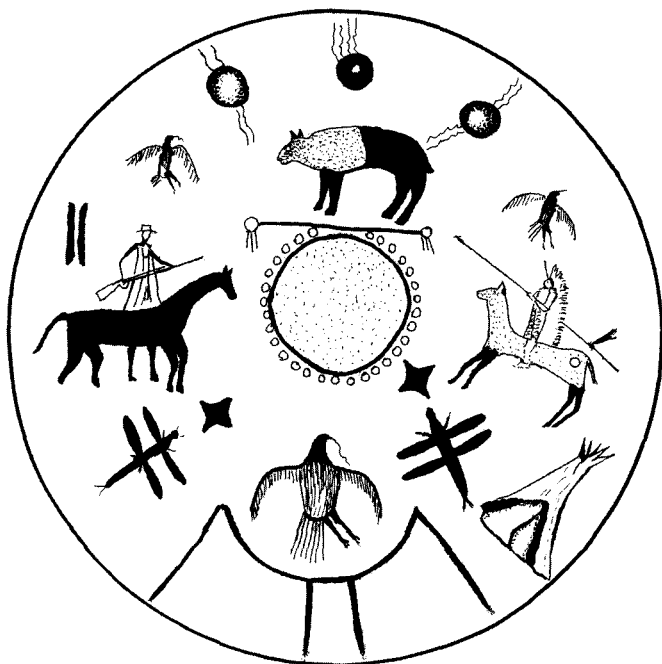
times by tasting her urine. Eventually the time become right. Then the male approached the female in a prancing manner, his mane erect, his legs stiff, and his muscles taut. Uttering a whining note that descended into a low roar, he turned his head from side to side as he approached, brushing her rump with his forelegs as he mounted, and almost immediately completing the mating process. The two then separated, the male moving off to look for other females, and the female also paying no more attention to the male with whom she had just mated. From that point on there would be no more close contact between the two, but eventually all the adults and young would begin to gather into large winter herds consisting of both sexes and animals of varied ages. Soon the rutting period was abruptly over, and males began to abandon the territories that they had so strongly defended only weeks before. By then the black sheaths of the males' horns had fallen off, leaving only their bony cores, and a new covering was slowly beginning to develop. Among the mated females, embryos were also slowly developing, to be transformed some thirty-five weeks later into a lively pair of fawns.

In both sexes, the summer coat of smooth and flexible body hair was being replaced by a longer and thicker pelage, each hair having tiny internal air spaces, thereby increasing the animal's insulation. In contrast to deer and elk, however, no heavy layer of winter fat was being deposited. Without this heavy fat load, the animals could always attain a speed far faster

than any coyote or wolf in an all-out chase. Yet, without this fatty layer, the animals could never go for extended winter periods without regular access to food, especially the protein-rich, albeit tiny, leaves of sagebrush.

As the pronghorns were busy establishing and defending their territories, frosty nights became more frequent. Ice began to appear along the edges of Wounded Knee Creek, and from overhead came the cries of migrating ducks, geese, and cranes. The ducks and geese mostly flew on clear nights when the skies were alive with stars that provided them with constant aerial guidelines, while the cranes flew only during the daylight hours, using landmarks such as rivers and mountain ranges to guide their way. All the birds were responding to innate urges, following routes that they had individually learned from their parents and had passed on to their offspring through uncountable years of retracing the same routes each fall and spring.

THE MOON OF FALLING LEAVES



Dakota shield design

Chapter 8

November 1900: Nights of the Northern Shadows

“Waziya, a mythical giant of the north who causes the cold north wind by blowing from his mouth. He comes near during the winter and recedes during the summer and is in continual contest with the south winds. He presides over snow and ice and guards the entrance to the dance of shadows of the north [the aurora borealis].”

—From *Lakota Myth*, by James R. Walker, edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1980:120); parenthetical words added for clarity

Late in the Moon of Deer Mating the Pine Ridge country was already wrapped in winter, the snow piling up to several feet deep in the valleys and lowlands, and Wounded Knee Creek was frozen to its bottom. Apart from the pervasive wails of the north wind, the entire area seemed almost deathly quiet. The

last flights of migrating geese were long gone, as were the ducks and most small birds. Owls the color of winter occasionally drifted above the snowfields like silent ghosts. They had been forced out of arctic tundras far to the north, and now were striving to stay alive on whatever mice, sharp-tailed grouse, or other vulnerable prey they could find.

Some large arctic-breeding hawks had also migrated in from the north, supplementing and replacing to some extent the resident red-tailed ones. The new arrivals had broad black bellybands and black-tipped white tails, and their lower legs were covered with an insulating layer of feathers that extended right down to the bases of their toes. The resident sharp-tailed grouse had similar feather leggings, and additionally during the past few months had developed an array of broad scales extending out sideways from both sides of their toes, converting them into miniature snowshoes for easy travel over deep snow. On the coldest days they also used their toes to help burrow into snowdrifts, where they could avoid the bitter wind, and where they were out of sight of both owls and hawks.

The hours of daylight for hunting were now growing shorter each day, and the nights correspondingly longer. On some clear nights the entire northern sky would be clothed in shimmering curtains of green light, dancing and pulsating as if responding to unearthly music. Using this light source, along with that reflected from the moon and the snow, great horned owls could hunt through the entire night, making

nighttime foraging just as dangerous as daytime activities for any small mammals that happened to be wandering about.

Near the northern forested base of Porcupine Butte were the remains of an old ponderosa pine that had been hit by lightning and fallen on its side a few years before, most of its tangled roots becoming exposed. The root system and its surrounding soil offered a refuge large enough for a mature coyote to enter and hide, as well as to provide an escape from the biting north wind. The resident male coyote had discovered the downed pine shortly after it had fallen, and now visited it regularly on daily rounds, which over the course of a year encompassed nearly thirty square miles. He marked the boundaries of his home range periodically with urine every time he passed, thereby claiming it as his own. He had also excavated the dirt surrounding the exposed pine roots enough so as to provide two openings that would both serve as entrances and emergency exits, one on each side of the root system. He had used the den frequently ever since, sometimes as a place to store excess food, and also at times to rest and digest food.

The coyote was in his early prime, three years old and weighing nearly thirty pounds. All through the fall he had largely relied on the nearby prairie-dog town for his food. Then, as snow had accumulated and the prairie dogs increasingly remained in their burrows, he had turned to eating cottontail rabbits, which were plentiful in the open woods, and he sometimes was

even able to surprise and subdue the much larger and more elusive jackrabbits. In the course of a night's searching the male often covered several square miles, avoiding human habitations as much as possible, and even ignoring their stupidly tame livestock, for he had learned through experience that where there were humans there also were likely to be watchdogs ready to give chase.



In its second fall of life the male had courted and mated with a young female. However, that following winter she had been caught in a trap, killed, and skinned for her pelt, also killing the litter of young she had been carrying. Thus the male was again on the search for a new mate.

Now it was time to find that new mate, and in recent weeks he had seen and carefully assessed a female that also hunted over part of his home range. Rather than

evict her, he began to follow her, and they soon realized that they were much more effective as a hunting team than when foraging alone. One day as he approached the female she didn't retreat, but instead lowered her tail and began to wag it slowly but strongly, as her ears lay flat against her head. Her mouth was slightly open, and her eyes were wide open. She then lowered her front legs so that they rested on the ground, keeping her hind legs raised, a posture she had always used with her brothers and sisters as an invitation to play when they had been youngsters. Then as the male approached still closer, she began to lick and nibble his muzzle. Finally, moving into a seating posture and still wagging her lowered tail, she lifted a front paw and gently touched the male's chest and face. With this, the male launched into a long, exuberant howl, in which the female joined immediately.

The two howled loudly for a long period, their calls echoing off the hills in the distance. Their howls never remained on exactly the same pitch, for when the male happened to match her pitch, the female would immediately raise or lower hers, adding to the call's harmonic beauty. Each howl lasted for several seconds before trailing off, then would begin again. Sometimes a new howl would have a brief preliminary yip or two, as if the animals were inhaling and building up steam for their joint delivery. For several minutes the animals thus sang together, then trotted off in tandem toward Porcupine Butte, where the male could proudly show his new mate the den that he had constructed.

As their pair-bonds strengthened, the two coyotes became inseparable. They would head out before dawn each morning, looking for early-rising rabbits and any nocturnally foraging animals that had not yet retreated to their dens. Working together, they were better able to run down jackrabbits by spelling one another during the chase. They also found that, when approaching a prairie-dog town, the best strategy was for the male to rather brazenly walk through the colony, causing great commotion and quick retreats of all the animals into their burrows. He would then walk off some distance and sit down on his haunches, attracting a prolonged chatter of animals from their positions of relative safety several hundred yards away. In the meantime, the female would quietly sneak up to one of the active burrows and lay silently beside its entrance. After a few minutes, as the prairie dogs began to relax their vigil, one of this burrow's occupants would come to the surface to try confirm the location of the distant coyote, only to be quickly snatched by its patient mate.

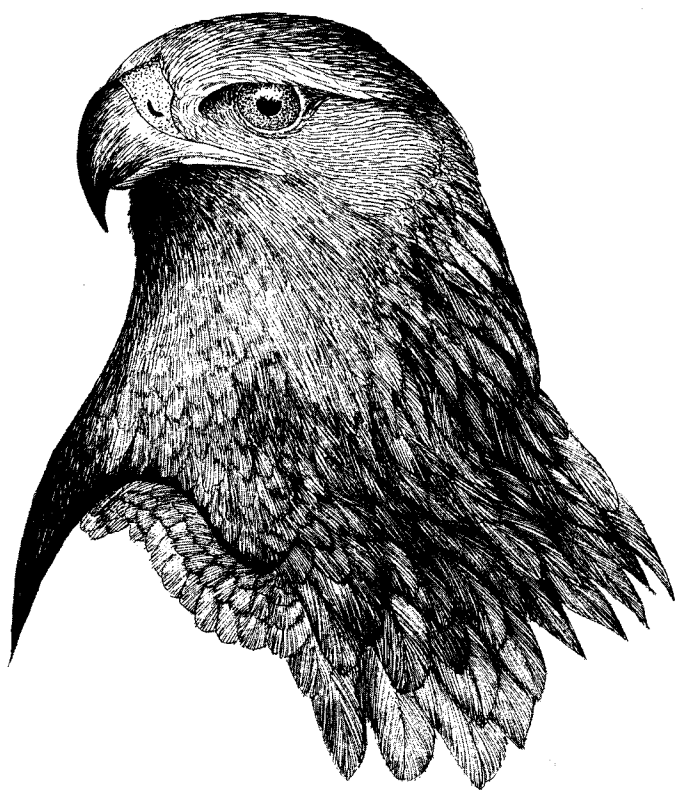
After pair-bonding, both the male and female participated in territorial scent-marking, but mostly it was done by the male. Most marking also occurred along the territorial boundaries, but sometimes marking was also done within the territorial limits. When marking by urinating, the males did so in much the same manner as when they were urinating normally, but usually scratched the ground afterward. The female did her scent-marking also by leg-lifting rather than by the usual squatting technique of females, by pulling one

leg forward and upward under the body, and crouching with the other hind leg. Scent-marking by defecation was also done by both sexes. Some scent-marking sites were visited regularly by the pair, with the markings renewed with each visit. These scent posts provided the pair with a sense of security from trespassing by other coyotes in their absence.

Now firmly mated, the pair also began to advertise their territory by regular howling. The two would stand side by side, their tails rapidly wagging and held horizontally, and their heads tilted upwards. Often their howling bouts would be answered by other coyotes in the area, thus helping the animals to assess both the distances that separated them, and also helping the pair to gain some idea of the other group's size. There were enough individual differences in the voices of the neighboring animals that, over time, the pair came to recognize all of their territorial neighbors, even though they rarely actually caught sight of one another.

*"He [Wakan Tanka] presides over the flights of
migratory birds, and the movements of herds
of buffalo, antelope, elk, deer
and mountain sheep."*

—From *Lakota Myth*, by J. R. Walker, edited by
R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1980:107-108);
parenthetic words added for clarity



Golden eagle, head design

Part 3:

The Reservation World (Oglala History, 1900 – 1950)

During the last four years of the 1890s, the percent of subsistence on the Pine Ridge Reservation that was fulfilled by “civilized pursuits” of reservation residents ranged from 20 to 30 percent, with the remainder being covered by the federal government. Finally, in 1902 the government cut off all subsistence to able-bodied men, and they were thereafter required to earn money to buy food.

In 1922 the Indian Office planned a five-year program that might develop a spirit of industry among reservation Indians. In each Pine Ridge community the men were to organize local chapters, and the women auxiliaries. The men were charged with planting increasingly larger vegetable gardens each year, and to increase their holdings of livestock such as cows, pigs, and chickens. The women were required to learn home-related activities, such as quilting, cooking, and canning. The children also had various clubs devoted to similar activities. Fairs were held, with prizes

awarded for outstanding individual efforts. Although great progress was made during the five-year period, the local tribal council finally met and concluded that if they didn't stop their activities, they would become self-supporting and all government aid might be dropped. As a result, the program was terminated.

In 1925 the reservation day schools increased their coverage from three grades to six, and the Pine Ridge Boarding School later became converted into a high school. Two consolidated schools were established, at Kyle and Allen, and a system of bus lines was gradually developed to carry children to and from school.

In 1928 a Brookings Institution survey of living conditions on Indian reservations indicated that the average annual per capita income of natives on the Pine Ridge Reservation was only eighty-six dollars. It was apparent by then that the reservation land-allotment program had been a total disaster, in part because of a total failure in governmental acculturation efforts, and especially because of inadequate and inappropriate educational efforts by governmental and religious organizations. Many of the Native-owned allotment holdings on the South Dakota reservations had already been lost by 1920, owing to foreclosures, tax delinquencies, and fraud on the part of unscrupulous whites.

Additionally, the small land allotments that had been given out on reservations during the late 1800s had progressively been divided and redivided. Heritage allotments had been passed from parents to children

and again to their grandchildren, each generation inheriting progressively less land, until eventually far too little remained in any individual's ownership to survive on or to even care about.

In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt named a new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier. Collier at once began to establish policies that were in direct opposition to the previous governmental allotment system, repurchasing Native lands that had reverted to outside ownership and encouraging Native cultures rather than suppressing them. The resulting Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 established tribal constitutions and allowed for the establishment of tribal loan programs and the development of tribal estates. Nearly 80,000 acres of tribal lands that had been lost to whites were repurchased and placed under tribal ownership in South Dakota.

By 1940 many of the able-bodied men on the Pine Ridge Reservation had been enrolled in federal government jobs, usually in work-relief projects such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, which helped build municipal parks, planted trees to serve as windbreaks and control erosion, and made other general environmental improvements. The CCC program was eliminated in 1942, shortly after the start of World War II. The sparsely populated northern part of the Pine Ridge Reservation north of the White River was also taken over in 1942 by the Air Force and South Dakota Air National Guard, for use as a practice bombing range and for aerial gunnery practice. By 1950 spent muni-

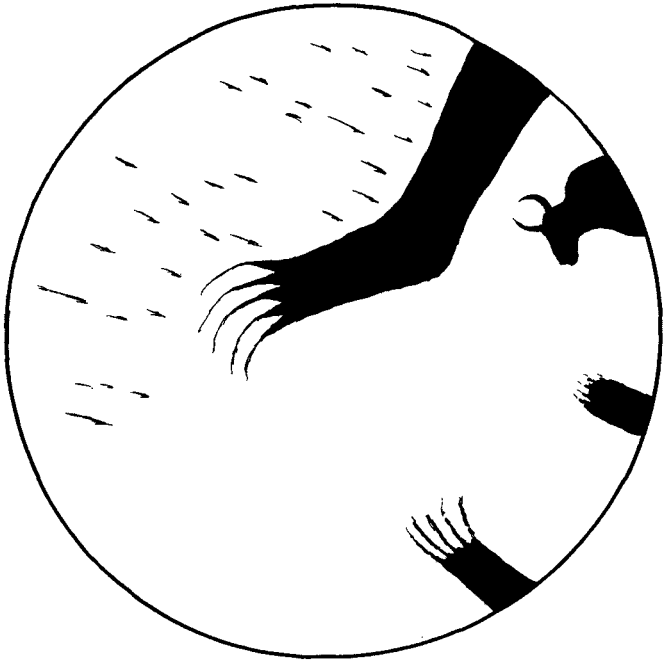
tions littered the northernmost parts of the Pine Ridge Reservation, especially in some remote sections such as the Oglala's historic Stronghold Tableland that were later incorporated into Badlands National Park. Thousands of Dakotas and other Native Americans served with honor during World War II, many exhibiting great bravery under battle, only to return home again after the war to a condition of abject poverty and marginalized citizenship.

By 1950 the population of South Dakota had reached 652,000, more than twice that of 1889 when the state had been admitted to the Union. Its post-war economy was booming, and its increasingly mechanized, fertilized, and pesticide-based agriculture was enjoying a period of unprecedented prosperity. Rural electrification programs had begun in 1935 when the New Deal administration brought electricity to most farms in the state. In 1944 hundreds of millions of dollars of federal money began flowing into South Dakota through the Flood Control Act. The construction of four massive main-stem Missouri River dams in South Dakota was begun; in sequence of construction they were Fort Randall, Oahe, Gavins Point, and Big Bend. Two other main-stem dams were also built in North Dakota and Montana. Their associated reservoirs soon flooded nearly all of the Missouri Valley's best flood-plain bottomlands of the Dakota, Arikara, Hidatsa, and Mandan reservations.

The Native American population of South Dakota was approaching 25,000 in 1950, with about 2 percent

then living off reservations. At mid-century about a third of the tribal rolls consisted of full-blooded Native Americans, virtually all of whom were of Dakota ancestry. The great majority of the reservation-living Native Americans were still living under conditions of abject poverty. Commonplace comforts available elsewhere in South Dakota, such as electrification and indoor plumbing, were unattainable dreams for most reservation dwellers.

Following the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Native American population increasingly became divided into two social classes. A small minority of Oglalas consisted of the better educated and usually mixed-blood individuals willing to cooperate with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and thereby to benefit from the few well-paying jobs that were selectively handed out by the BIA bureaucrats. These "New Deal" Natives were strongly opposed by the majority, namely the Traditionalists who preferred to retain their pattern of tribal self-government based on their ancestral religious and cultural beliefs. This progressive cleavage of the culture into the more prosperous New Dealers and the poverty-bound Traditionalists would have disastrous consequences a half-century later.



Dakota shield design

Chapter 9

January 1950: Jimmy Fox and His Winter Dreams

"The Indians are red, so they are the favorite people of the sun. White is the favorite color of Wasiya (the Spirit of the North and symbolic of winter). The white people are like Wasiya. They have no mercy on the red people."

—From *Lakota Myth*, by J. R. Walker, edited by R. J. DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1982:108-109); parenthetical words added for clarity

Jimmy Fox was twelve years old in 1950. His grandmother, Little Cottonwood, had nearly died during the flu epidemic of 1918–1919, which had killed many of the other Pine Ridge Reservation residents. Little Cottonwood never fully recovered her health, and she died of pneumonia in the winter of 1921. Her husband, Red Fox, had somehow avoided the illness, as had their only child, a boy they named Tommy, who had been born in 1919. After Little Cottonwood's death, Tommy and his father continued to live in the

PART 3: THE RESERVATION WORLD (1900-1950)

simple cabin Red Fox had built near the edge of Wounded Knee Creek. There they trapped minks, foxes, and coyotes, whose pelts could be sold to fur dealers in Pine Ridge village and provide enough income for them to barely survive on. These years were the peak of the Depression, with intensely cold winters, hot, dry summers, and virtually no real jobs were to be found. During the mid-1930s Tommy joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, clearing brush, developing campsites, and laying out hiking trails in the nearby Black Hills National Forest.

In spite of all this, Tommy found time to court and marry Ruth Little Bull, a young woman from Pine Ridge village, and father a son, Jimmy, who was born in 1938. When World War II began in 1941, Tommy joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He died on Okinawa Beach in April of 1945, and was posthumously awarded a Silver Star. His widow Ruth later traded it to a tourist in exchange for a warm woolen coat.

Jimmy Fox could barely remember his father, for he had been only three when Tommy had left home for the military, and his father had only been able to return home once before being shipped overseas in 1943. As a result, Jimmy had largely been raised by his mother, Ruth. After Tommy's death, Ruth and Jimmy had joined Red Fox in his cabin along Wounded Knee Creek, where he had lived alone since the death of Little Cottonwood. A small Episcopal-run day school had been established in Porcupine village, and when Jimmy was seven years old he began to attend. There

he learned to read and write English, and also began to learn something of the wider world around him.

Jimmy was a bright boy, and from his grandfather he learned much about the wildlife of the area. He learned to pay close attention to the many different calls of crows, which always were on the alert for possible danger. He learned how to track deer, and how to use the dipper-like star pattern of the northern sky to find his way across the countryside at night. He learned how to watch the shapes of clouds, and how changes in wind direction could be used to foretell the weather. He soon discovered that high clouds resembling a school of tiny fish swimming together or resembling the wispy tail of a pony meant that cold weather would be arriving in a day or so, and that a strong east wind meant that rain or a hailstorm might soon occur. He learned from his grandfather what plants were good to eat, such as the prairie turnip and purple mallow, and how to recognize the ones that were not. He learned that the carrot-like roots of the purple mallow could be eaten raw, and its leaves and bright purple flowers also could be plucked and eaten. He observed that the stems of the hard-to-find prairie turnip often pointed the way toward the next plant, thus telling him where to go to dig up another underground tuber. He especially liked to eat wild chokecherries and wild strawberries, and slowly even came to like the salty-sour taste of the leaves, seed pods, and underground tubers of wood sorrel, which

stimulated his saliva and which he could chew to quench his thirst on long hikes.

Of all the animals that Jimmy learned about, it was the buffalo that most interested him. He saw pictures of buffalo in some of his schoolbooks, and he knew from his grandfather that *tatanka* had been a powerful influence in the history of the Oglala people. On one of his hikes along Wounded Knee Creek, he saw some bones protruding from an eroding bank, and among them was the ancient skull of a buffalo. Digging it out from the bank, he washed it clean of dirt, carried it home, and set it out on the roof of their cabin to dry out. When it was finally dry and had sun-bleached to a chalky white, he placed it beside his bed. He also affixed a candle to its forehead so he could read by its dim light. He would reach out in the middle of the long, frigid nights and touch the skull whenever he felt alone and frightened. Simply knowing it was there beside him gave him a strong sense of calm and of security.

During the worst days of winter, Jimmy often had to stay home from school, as the half-mile walk to the day school at Wounded Knee was too treacherous to attempt. The snow lay deep in the valley, and although Wounded Knee Creek was frozen over, it was always possible that he might break through the ice and be unable to extract himself before freezing to death. Jimmy always carefully looked to find hoof prints where deer had safely crossed the creek before he ventured across, and he carried a strong stick to use as a

pole in the event that he should break through.

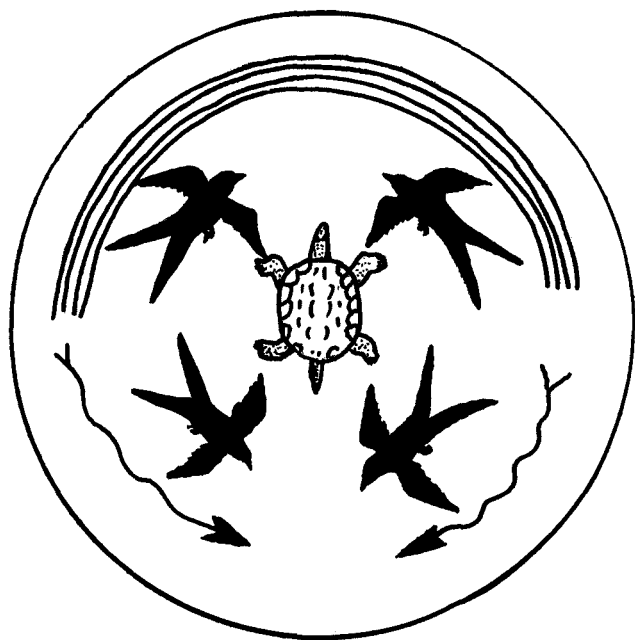
One day on his way to school, as he approached Wounded Knee Creek, he saw an eagle sitting near the top of the tallest cottonwood along the creek. It was an adult of the eagle kind his grandfather always called the spotted eagle, but which Jimmy had learned in school was really an adult golden eagle. The eagle carefully watched Jimmy as he approached, noting the long pole he carried, apparently judging whether it might be a gun. Jimmy lowered the pole to make it less threatening, and kept his head turned away from the bird so as not to let it know it had been seen. As Jimmy stepped onto the ice of the creek, the eagle screamed loudly and circled above Jimmy in a tight circle. Pausing, Jimmy could see from the dark color of the ice that it was quite thin, and would almost certainly give way should he cross there. Walking downstream a few hundred yards, Jimmy found a downed cottonwood tree whose trunk spanned the river, and he quickly clambered over it. Overhead, the eagle was still circling high above, but was now nearly out of sight among the low winter clouds.

That evening, as Jimmy recounted his eventful day to his grandfather, Red Fox gravely said, "You must realize that the spotted eagle you saw was actually the spirit of your ancestral grandfather Dancing Eagle, who is always watching over your safety. He was a great Oglala warrior, and has appeared to you as the eagle-spirit. He was sitting in the cottonwood tree in memory of your grandmother Little Cottonwood. It is

your responsibility to pray to the eagle-spirit, thanking him for saving your life, and in the future to revere both the spotted eagle and the cottonwood.”

When Jimmy finally fell asleep that night he dreamt of riding on the back of a golden eagle, far above the wooded valley of Wounded Knee Creek. And, when he walked down to the cottonwood that had been the perching site of the eagle the following morning, he found one of its black-and-white tail feathers at the base of the tree. Taking it home, he reverently placed it beside his buffalo skull.

JIMMY FOX AND HIS WINTER DREAMS



Dakota shield design

Chapter 10

February 1950: The Moon of Popping Trees

“When Wa-zee-yah, the North-Wind, the Cold-Maker comes, the animals put on thicker robes and some even change their color to be like the white blanket that he lays over earth.”

—*Wigwam Evenings*
(Eastman & Eastman, 1930)

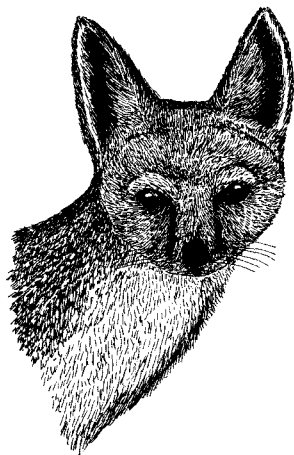
In the icy heart of a Pine Ridge winter, life becomes almost unbearable for prey and predators alike. Some of the red-tailed hawks and prairie falcons had gradually moved south, following the snow line to find better hunting opportunities, while others such as the golden eagles had been unwilling to abandon their hunting territories and their nest sites to possible intruders. Such was the case with the pair of golden eagles whose territory centered on Slim Butte, overlooking the rich hunting grounds of the White River Valley. As the winter had progressed, they had

expanded their hunting ranges ever farther west into the territory of the pair that had nested at Lone Butte, until the female had been shot by whites who had been recreationally “vaporizing” prairie dogs with scope-mounted high-powered rifles. The eagles also hunted south to Isinglass Butte and even beyond to the dense pine forests of the Pine Ridge escarpment. To the north were the White River badlands, where jackrabbits were still abundant, and where vegetation was so scarce that there were few available above-ground hiding places for animals larger than a mouse. Should they fail to locate any jackrabbits, there were also possibilities for finding the smaller cottontails, or even a slight chance of catching a red fox unaware.

Each morning, as soon as the sun was high enough above the horizon to offer the eagles the opportunity to exploit their keen color vision, they would launch themselves into the sky for another daily patrol. On some days they hunted solitarily. This occurred most often in winter, where few of the prey animals most likely to be encountered were so large or so difficult to capture that teamwork would be needed. At other times they flew together, especially when they were concentrating on catching prey as large as white-tailed jackrabbits.

On this particular morning the birds left together and headed north. As they approached the eroded edges of the White River badlands, they turned west so that the sun would be directly behind them. Now the lands below were crisply outlined, and any moving ob-

ject readily seen. This visibility was especially important for finding white-tailed jackrabbits, for in mid-winter their fur coats were wholly white, except for their black-tipped ears. The black-tailed jackrabbits were much easier to detect against the snow, for they keep their brownish body fur color throughout the winter, and their distinctive black tail also helps to make them more visible against a white background.



As the two eagles soared silently above the badlands they saw a flicker of movement below. Even from several hundred yards they could see at once it was not a rabbit, but instead was a small tan-colored fox. The eagles were already quite familiar with red foxes, and very occasionally had managed to catch juveniles. However, the eagles knew from past experiences that foxes were also as sharp-eyed as they, and could rarely

be caught off guard. They had not encountered a fox like this before. Only half the size of a red fox, and even smaller than a jackrabbit, the animal was standing near a burrow opening and peering in. Yet, it offered a chance for a meal and was not to be ignored.

Setting their wings into a somewhat retracted position, the two eagles began a long, descending glide, their speed gradually increasing as they descended toward the fox. The male positioned himself directly behind the female, making him less conspicuous and allowing him the opportunity for another attempt at the fox should the female miss.

The swift fox, a male, had only been active a short time since sunrise. He had just emerged from his den, an abandoned prairie-dog burrow that a badger had dug out and the swift fox had later occupied and modified for his own use. Like most prairie-dog burrows, this one had several entrances, and was one of a dozen badger holes and prairie-dog burrows that the fox sometimes used as dens. These extra dens were scattered around the fox's home range and sometimes served as short-term escape sites, or were used by the male to escape temporarily from the chilling effects of winter winds while he was out hunting.

Suddenly aware that his view of the sun had momentarily disappeared and sensing danger, the fox scampered back into the burrow just as the female eagle's outstretched talons swept by overhead, followed almost immediately by the male's. By the time the fox finally dared to crawl up to the burrow's en-

trance and cautiously peer out, the two eagles were already far out of sight.

The fox gradually regained his courage to venture out of the burrow, for he was still hungry and needed to be on the move. He had hunted throughout the previous night, covering nearly ten miles, with but little to show for his efforts. He ate whatever he could find on these nightly excursions, most often catching mice and voles, but also eating carrion such as road-killed birds and rabbits that he found along the only road that crossed his home range. Indeed, one of his favorite dens was only a short distance from this road, which he investigated every night. The road was also a favorite place for prairie-dog hunters to travel, and the animals that they shot became available for coyotes, swift foxes, and golden eagles to claim.

The swift fox male was a solitary hunter. The tons of bait poisons that had been put out by Bureau of Indian Affairs agents to control prairie dogs had also secondarily poisoned the foxes and coyotes that had consumed their carcasses, resulting in prolonged and agonizingly painful deaths. The much larger and more abundant coyotes also killed swift foxes whenever they could catch them. Swift foxes also frequently became the prey of other larger predators, such as bobcats, red foxes, and golden eagles. And because of their innate curiosity, swift foxes were easily approached and shot, and similarly were readily trapped. Furthermore, in spite of their name and notable running abilities, swift foxes were also not always swift enough to avoid

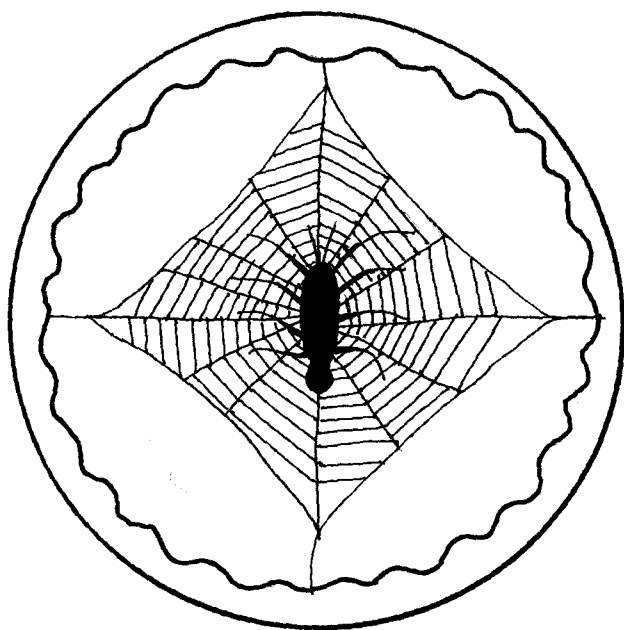
being run over by vehicles while engaged in eating road-killed carrion. The combined result of all these powerful influences was that swift foxes had become extremely rare in the Pine Ridge reservation. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century swift foxes had been totally eliminated from nearly all of their historic range between the shortgrass prairies of southwestern Canada and the steppe-like plains of western Texas and eastern New Mexico, surviving marginally only where relict stands of native grasses still supported viable prairie-dog populations.

Of course the male swift fox had no idea that he was one of the last survivors of his species in the Pine Ridge reservation, just as the few black-footed ferrets that he sometimes encountered on his nightly hunts across the prairie-dog town were also the last of their kind anywhere in the western plains.

*Thus (after having been defeated in battle), the animals
were convinced that Man is their master.
When they sued for peace, all agreed to give him
of their flesh for food and their skins for
clothing, while he on his side promised
never to kill wantonly.*

—*Wigwam Evenings* (Eastman & Eastman, 1930);
parenthetic words added for clarity

THE MOON OF POPPING TREES



Dakota shield design

Chapter 11

March 1950: The Eagle Quest of Jimmy Fox

*He [a wakan man] can talk with animals and
with trees and with stones."*

—*Lakota Myth*, by J. R. Walker, edited by R. J.
DeMallie and Elaine A. Jahner (1980:69);
parenthetic words added for clarity

Winter began to show signs of weakening by the third month of the year, with Wounded Knee Creek finally breaking free of its icy roof, and the sounds of chickadees and blue jays enlivening the increasingly frequent sunny mornings. New nighttime snows still occasionally dusted the tops of the pines, but by mid-day these had usually melted away, and the pale lavender blooms of pasqueflowers were beginning to appear on the sunny southern slopes of Porcupine Butte. The calls of migrating snow geese and Canada geese could often be heard high overhead, and on calm, moonlit nights paired great horned owls softly called to one

another as they went about the business of tending to their newly hatched young. Usually the female would start these call sequences, her six-note hoots being answered immediately by the five-note responses of the male, informing her of his exact location and assuring her that all is well. The owls were the first birds of the area to begin nesting and the first to hatch their clutches, for their young would need more than two months to fledge and become proficient in flying, and many months after that would be needed for them to learn how to capture enough food to survive on their own the following winter.

After his winter eagle encounter, Jimmy Fox had spent all his spare time the past few months thinking about eagles and reading what little he could find out about them. He had heard from his grandfather that spotted eagles had once nested on the steepest slopes of Porcupine Butte, but had not been seen there in many decades. Jimmy also learned from others that he talked to in Porcupine village that eagles were believed to nest on some steep cliffs and buttes to the north in the Badlands, and also far to the west in the high forests of the Black Hills. The Black Hills were far too far for Jimmy to hike to, but from a highway map Jimmy estimated that the nearest Badlands were only about twenty-five miles to the north, and he could reach them by simply following Wounded Knee or Porcupine Creek northward. According to one old, life-long resident of Wounded Knee, near the area where Porcupine Creek and Wounded Knee Creek join a larger

river is a very tall butte, called Chimney Butte, and there he would find the place where the spotted eagle nests.

As soon as Jimmy heard about Chimney Butte, he began to make his plans to hike to it and look for the eagle nest. There was a week-long Easter vacation coming up in late March, and Jimmy believed he could make the trip up and back in no more than five or six days. He gradually put together a small pile of supplies, including a bedroll, a frying pan, a box of matches that he had made waterproof by dipping the tip of each in melted wax, a backpack, and a hatchet. He also had a jackknife, a compass, and a military canteen that had been among the personal possessions of his father, and that had been returned to his mother by a Marine Corps officer when he had delivered the Silver Star. For food Jimmy would carry a supply of dried venison that his grandfather had prepared from a deer he shot the previous fall. He also had a few dozen dried roots of prairie turnips that he had dug up the previous summer, and which he could boil and eat along with whatever else he might find to eat. Lastly, as a good luck charm, he sewed the quill of his eagle feather into his wool cap, so that its vane hung down behind his head.

The first morning of his long trek dawned crisp and cold, and after saying goodbye to his mother and grandfather, Jimmy left their cabin and headed north along Wounded Knee Creek. It was easy going, for much of the time he could follow a gravel road that

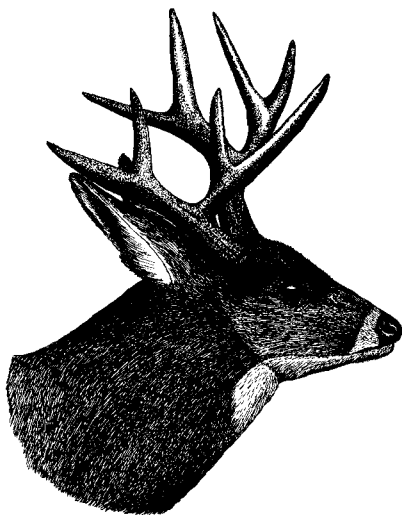
closely paralleled the creek. By that afternoon he had reached the tiny village of Manderson, where he stopped at the house of a distant relative to refill his canteen with fresh water. There he was taken in, and given a warm meal and a place by the wood stove to lay out his bedroll.

From Manderson north the trip would be more difficult, for there would be no more villages or perhaps even any habitations. But the BIA road had been improved to provide better tourist access to Badlands National Monument, and Jimmy knew he could make good time by heading out on it the next morning, rather than hiking along the meandering creek bank. Before long he found a dead cottontail that had been hit by a car the night before and had not yet found by coyotes or other scavengers. Jimmy tied the carcass to his belt, knowing it would provide nourishing meals for him over the next few days.

By late that afternoon, Jimmy could look to the west and see that he was approaching a larger river, the White River, and that Wounded Knee Creek would eventually flow into it. It was a muddy river, filled with whitish clay sediments, and unlike Wounded Knee Creek he would not be able to rely on it if he ran out of drinking water. But Jimmy also knew that he would probably be able to see Chimney Butte when he had reached the point where Wounded Knee Creek meets the White River. As sunset approached, Jimmy finally came to Wounded Knee Creek's confluence with the White River and, looking to the northeast, he could fi-

nally see, illuminated by the setting sun, the rugged profile of Chimney Butte barely two miles away.

Jimmy put out his bedroll beside the edge of the White River, soon falling asleep to its soft rippling sounds. In the fading light he listened to the calls of coyotes in the far distance, and could hear but only faintly see a small herd of mule deer as they waded across the shallow stream only a hundred feet or less from where he lay.



With the morning sunrise, Jimmy was wide-awake, and he soon had a good fire burning, using dead branches he gathered from the river's edge. He skinned and cleaned the rabbit, impaled it on a sharpened stick, and held it over the fire, wishing all the while that he

had remembered to bring along some salt. But the thought of soon again seeing an eagle was too powerful to think about than considering either the lack of any salt or the chill of the night to come.

Putting out the fire with river water, Jimmy picked up his gear and headed directly toward Chimney Butte. By the time he was halfway there, he could see an eagle approaching. Jimmy immediately sat down cross-legged, and held up one arm, as if to say hello. As the eagle approached, its golden neck plumage reflected the color of burnished copper in the early morning light, and as it passed directly overhead it screamed loudly, just as the eagle had done the previous time by Wounded Knee Creek. This time, however, it then circled back toward the butte and landed near a gigantic wooden nest on the butte's southern face.

After seeing the nest, Jimmy knew he should progress carefully, in order to not disturb the birds too greatly. He detoured toward the north until the nest was hidden from view, and then quietly approached. After every few hundred yards Jimmy would stop, lay down in the buffalo grass, and study the scene before him. He imagined Chimney Butte to be an ancient fortress, not far from where his ancestors held out for months against the white men, and where in 1890 they performed Ghost Dances and asked for divine protection from the soldiers' bullets.

Slowly, as Jimmy approached the butte, its details emerged. He saw that, as steep as it was, there were places he could climb it and even perhaps reach the

very top. There was no sign of the eagles as he carefully made his way up the dried but crumbling surface of the butte. As the butte had eroded under the influence of wind, rain, and hail, it exposed the layers of clay and gravel that had been deposited by some ancient river flowing through the area tens of millions of years before, these deposits only to be slowly but relentlessly cut down again and being gradually washed toward the seas by the now-placid rivers flowing through the Badlands.

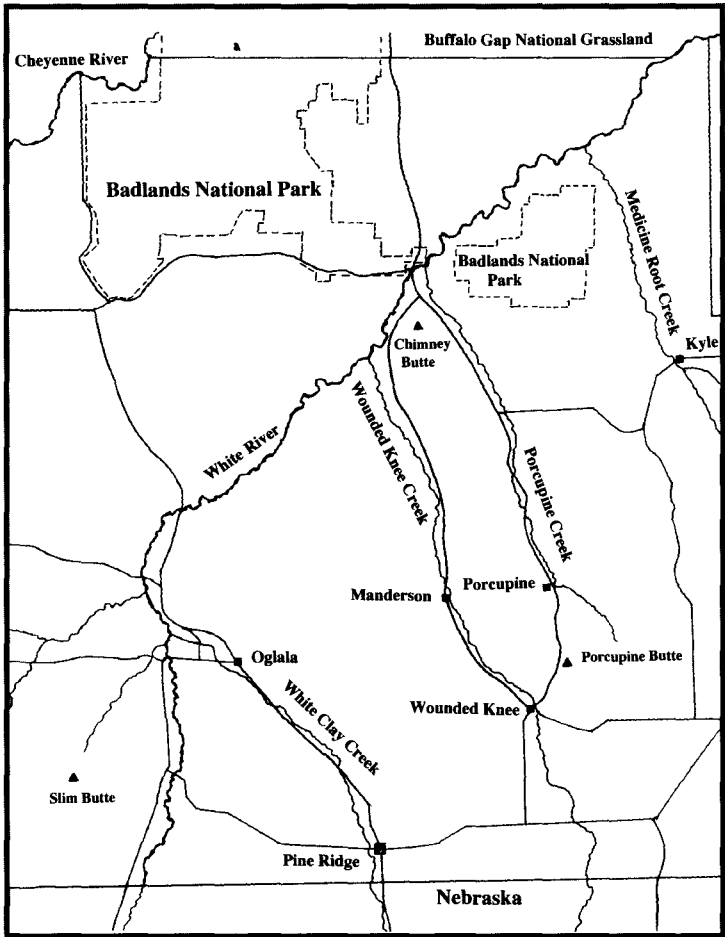
Jimmy wasn't aware of the millions of years of earth history he was climbing over—he was living in the here and now, alert to all the sights and sounds around him. As he neared the level of the butte where he thought the nest might be situated, Jimmy very carefully and quietly crawled toward the southern side. He soon came to a window-like opening in the rocks and excitedly peered through. There, only thirty feet below him, was the nest, with one of the adult eagles comfortably settled down in its deep cup. As he moved one hand in order to obtain a better grip, a few small pebbles became dislodged and rolled down the slope. Immediately the eagle looked up, and with a scream took flight out of the nest and into the air, revealing two large eggs and the remains of a recently eaten cottontail rabbit.

A second and smaller eagle, perched several hundred feet away on a low rocky promontory, also took off and flew toward Jimmy, as if to challenge him. Jimmy covered his head with his hands and said a

silent prayer. The eagle flew by silently in front of him no more than ten feet away, the shadow of its great wings passing over him, and its wing sounds seeming almost deafening. As Jimmy opened his eyes, he could see the eagle circling directly above him, in the same sort of dizzying flight pattern that he had seen the previous winter. But he could also see that the eagle had one missing tail feather, exactly like the one he had affixed to his cap, and he somehow knew that he had found the very bird he had been looking for.

Jimmy remained immobile for a few moments, hoping that the birds would return to the nest. Then, worrying that the eggs might get chilled if he remained any longer, he began his slow descent. After Jimmy finally reached flat ground, he ran as fast and as far as his legs would carry him, reveling in the knowledge that he had seen his famous ancestor, and would honor and protect eagles for the rest of his life. Looking back, in the far distance he could see a lone eagle rising high in the sky, then swooping vertically downward, until it almost touched the ground, then rising again and repeating the same aerial dance. "Now," thought Jimmy, "I finally understand why my great warrior ancestor was called 'Dancing Eagle.' "

THE EAGLE QUEST OF JIMMY FOX



Map of the western part of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation (Shannon County, South Dakota), 2006. Map by author, after various sources.

Part 4:

The Modern World (Oglala History, 1950 – 2000)

Long ago a great flood came from the western mountains and threatened to cover the plains. Then a great buffalo went out to hold back the waters and preserve the Dakota Nation. Ever since, the buffalo has lost one hair each year, and after each cycle of history he has lost one leg. When he has lost his hair and all his legs, the waters will flood and destroy the Dakota Nation. The buffalo now has only a single leg, and is nearly hairless.

—Dakota myth

During the early 1970s, there were about 13,500 people living on the 1.7-million acre Pine Ridge Reservation, or about three persons per square mile. Of these, 74 percent were classified as Native Americans and about half of these were full-blooded, but by then 17 percent of all the reservation's Native Americans had no knowledge of the Lakota language. The

reservation population was then 45 percent Catholic, 38 percent Episcopalian, and 11 percent Presbyterian. Nine other religions comprised the remaining 6 percent, including the Native American Church. Its members still performed some traditional Native ceremonies, and also frequently incorporated the potent hallucinogen peyote into their rituals. Also at that time the reservation's unemployment rate was nearly 37 percent, about ten times the national average, and nearly two-thirds of the families had incomes of under \$3,000 per year. Indoor plumbing was present in only 40 percent of homes.

During this same period, about a third of the reservation dwellings were still simple log cabins, many dating as far back as the 1800s. Some of these had sod roofs and dirt floors, and most were of only a single room with a central wood stove. Most lacked indoor plumbing. More modern houses on the reservation that had been built after World War II were of frame construction, and were mostly occupied by mixed-bloods who were somehow associated with the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The increasing rift between the more affluent residents of the reservation and the hard-core traditionalists would ultimately lead to a second tragedy of Wounded Knee. In 1972 the traditionalists asked the leaders of the upstart American Indian Movement to help them in their efforts to get the U.S. government to enforce the 1968 Fort Laramie Treaty. Late in 1972 Russell Means, a tribal member, was arrested by BIA

PART 4: THE MODERN WORLD (1950-2000)

police for talking openly about the long trail of broken treaties of which the U.S. government was guilty. A few months later a full-blooded Oglala man was brutally stabbed to death by a white man, who was later charged only with second-degree manslaughter. The riot that followed this minimal charge resulted in the jailing of thirty Natives, thirteen of whom were later indicted.

Early in 1973, sixty-five federal marshals descended on the Pine Ridge Reservation. These were soon followed by additional U.S. marshals and the FBI. Also brought in were BIA police that supplemented a widely despised "goon squad" operating as the tribal president's personal enforcement agency. Police roadblocks soon had the village of Wounded Knee surrounded and cut off from all food and water. The second battle of Wounded Knee that finally erupted in the summer of 1973 ironically resembled the first, in that it pitted a handful of Oglalas against all these federal agencies who were armed with superior weapons and associated technology. In spite of the overwhelming odds against the Oglalas, it was a standoff for seventy-one days. In the end, of course, history repeated itself with the near-destruction of Wounded Knee village and the deaths of two Natives. However, in early May the government agreed to a truce and sent a White House delegation to discuss the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, which had been broken and repeatedly ignored by the federal government for more than a century.

By the year 2000, about 15,000 persons were living

on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. However, the percentage of the population living below the poverty level in Shannon County had by 2000 increased to more than 50 percent. The reservation unemployment rate in the 1990s had increased to 63 percent, nearly five times the national average. The reservation's average annual family income of \$3,700 was less than the annual per capita incomes of more than one hundred second- and third-world countries, including those of Jamaica, Armenia, and Sri Lanka. Nearly 30 percent of the reservation population was homeless.

Also by 2000, infant mortality rates on the reservation were the highest of anywhere in America, six times the national average, and children were twenty times more likely to be born with fetal alcohol syndrome, the syndrome rate about 25 percent. The adult alcoholism rate at Pine Ridge was estimated at 70 to 80 percent. Death rates from alcohol-related causes and auto accidents were all substantially above the national average, and over half the population over forty years of age was suffering from diabetes. Suicide rates were twice the national average and three times higher for teenagers. The mean life expectancy was forty-eight years for men and fifty-two for women, or about two-thirds the U.S. national average.

The town of Pine Ridge, the largest in the entire Pine Ridge reservation, had more than doubled in the past fifty years to a population of about 3,000 people in 2000. No motel or hotel was present in town, nor was one present anywhere on the entire reservation. The

Pine Ridge Agency building, housing BIA and the reservation police offices, was still located at the town's main intersection. Just across the street to the south was the town's primary tourist attraction, a combination filling station and café named Big Bat's Texaco, named after Big Bat, a nineteenth-century interpreter-scout whose descendants still owned and operated the business. By 2000 Pine Ridge also had an AM radio station, KILI, broadcasting both Lakota and English. Since the 1930s the Oglalas had been legally allowed to perform their Sun Dance ritual, and since 1955 the Sun Dance had been performed annually in a large arena at the northeast edge of Pine Ridge. The hundreds of tourists that it attracted each summer were by then adding significant additional income to the local economy.

By the year 2000 the population of Wounded Knee was still barely 300, the village mostly consisting of ramshackle houses randomly scattered along the valley of Wounded Knee Creek. Toward the west, the KILI station's AM antenna had been erected on the crest of Porcupine Butte, and a few scattered houses had been built at its base. A crude pole shelter, covered overhead with pine boughs to provide some shade from the intense summer heat, had been erected near the entrance to Wounded Knee Cemetery. Looking much like Masai souvenir stands on the Serengeti plains of Tanzania, it provided a place where locals could sell beadwork trinkets to tourists. Remarkably, no official government roadside signage was present to mark one

of the most famous and tragic events in western American history, but a large hand-painted wooden sign, partly defaced with graffiti, provided tourists with a brief history of what had transpired there more than a century ago.

Driving eastward toward the village of Wounded Knee from Porcupine Butte, few changes were visible from what a similar 1950s panoramic view would have provided, except that a Native-run tourist information center had been established in a metal building at the base of Wounded Knee Cemetery. The cemetery itself also had some new additions, including the remains of Lawrence ("Buddy") Lamont. Lamont was a thirty-one-year-old Oglala Dakota and Vietnam marine veteran who had been shot and killed by an FBI sniper in April of 1973 during the Wounded Knee uprising. Frank Clearwater was also killed during the uprising and his widow had wanted to also bury him there, but the U.S. government would not allow it because he was of Cherokee descent, not a Dakota.

A few dozen fenced-in bison roamed the hills northeast of town, and its nearby slopes were extensively pockmarked with prairie-dog holes. Other bison herds were also scattered around the reservation, providing both a valuable source of protein and raw materials for tribal ceremonies. In common with an increasing drought and overgrazing by cattle, the reservation population of prairie dogs had grown to about 100,000 acres by shortly after the turn of the twenty-first century, and contained what had become perhaps the

country's largest remaining prairie-dog colony. This colony extended east-west for at least twelve miles, from the vicinity of Oglala to at least the western edge of the reservation at the Fall River County line (the western boundary of Buffalo Gap National Grassland). Coyotes roamed freely over the area, but many were badly afflicted with mange. Bobcats were also fairly common, and posed as much a threat to prairie dogs as did the coyotes. Black-footed ferrets, one of the most highly endangered of all North American mammals, had been reintroduced in 1991 and were doing well in the Conata Basin of Buffalo Gap National Grassland directly to the north of the reservation, where the prairie-dog population was also substantial.

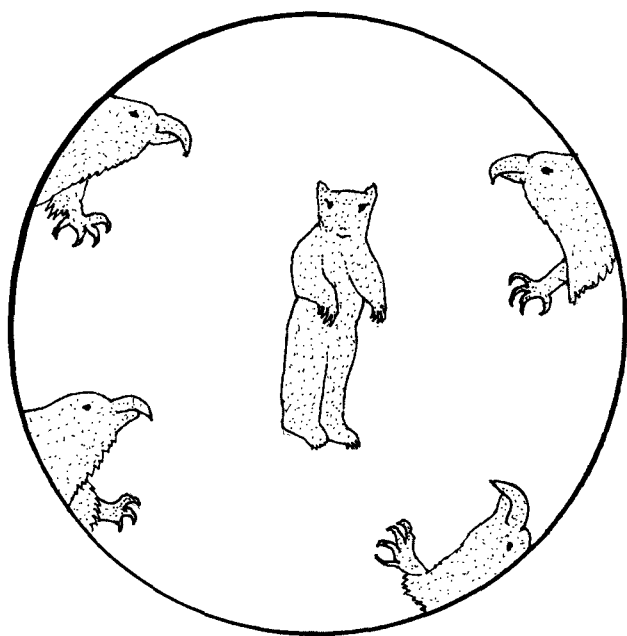
Although several years of severe drought in western South Dakota had benefited prairie dogs and thus had also helped boost ferret populations, the prolonged drought had severely hurt cattle-grazing opportunities. Grazing fees assessed through the Bureau of Indian Affairs to large, white-owned cattle operations had become the largest single source of income to tribal members, and prairie-dog poisoning efforts had occurred on some parts of the reservation.

In 2000 national cattle interests began to lobby strongly in the now Republican-dominated halls of Washington for the removal of the black-tailed prairie dog as a candidate for federal protection as a threatened species, in order to allow massive federally funded poisoning efforts. And, just south of the Pine Ridge Reservation boundary, the unincorporated vil-

PART 4: THE MODERN WORLD (1950-2000)

lage of White Clay, Nebraska, was selling over 12,000 cans of beer daily, bringing in nearly four million dollars annually to the four establishments providing it.

PART 4: THE MODERN WORLD (1950-2000)



'Dakota shield design

Chapter 12

April 2000: The Cranes Return to Pine Ridge

"There are four parts in everything that grows from the earth, the roots, the stem, the leaves and the fruit. There are four kinds of things that breath: those that crawl, those that fly, those that walk on four legs, and those that walk on two legs."

—James LaPointe,
Legends of the Lakota (1976: 27)

Four is the most auspicious number of all the numbers known to the Lakotas; there are four sacred directions in the world and four divisions of time—the day, the night, the moon, and the year. April represents the fourth moon if the beginning of the year is counted as starting with the Middle Moon of January, which corresponds with the middle of winter. Certainly January is typically the coldest month in the Great Plains, even through by early January the sun's path is already daily rising slightly higher above the noon

horizon, and every night is also ever so slightly shorter than the previous one. But daytimes in January are ruled by a still-frigid sun, and the north wind often blows relentlessly both day and night, tossing snowflakes into ever-higher drifts.

The same bitter weather is typical of the year's second moon, the Moon of Popping Trees, when ice-bound trees sometimes sharply crack like gunfire under the weight of their icy mantles. Even throughout the third moon, the Moon of Snow Blindness, the prevailing color of the Pine Ridge world is white, and one must be careful to shade one's eyes from intense sun glare when venturing outside. It is not until the fourth moon of the year that snow banks begin to melt on sunny southern slopes and the first green leaves begin to make timid appearances.

One of the first flowers to make an early spring appearances on the high plains is the pasqueflower (*hoksi cekpa*), which according to Dakota lore produces its beautiful purple flowers while the plant is still draped in late winter snow. It then calls to all the other flowers, urging them to awaken as well and to celebrate the ending of another long winter, even if its own blossoms will soon have shriveled and have been replaced by long, hair-like strands of grayish silver silk. According to the Dakotas, the song of the pasqueflower is:

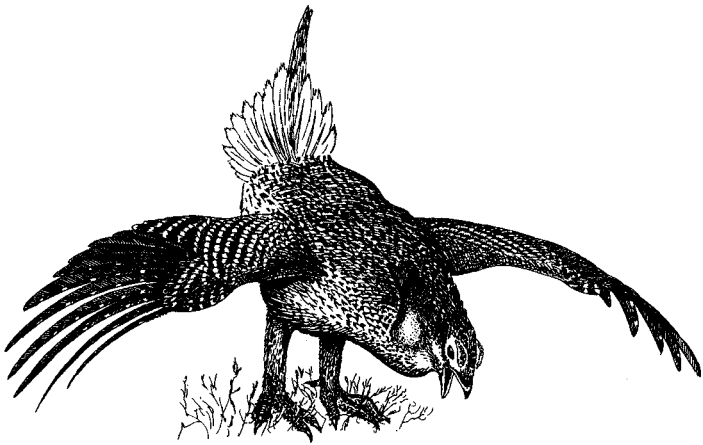
*I wish to encourage the children
Of other flower nations now appearing*

*All over the face of the earth;
So while they awaken from sleeping
And come up from the heart of the earth
I am standing here old and gray-bearded.*

The April sun was already rising above the eastern hills, but hadn't managed to thaw the frost around the openings to the prairie-dogs' burrows. The prairie dogs were never early risers, but they now were slowly moving about and eager to get outside and start searching for the first green sprigs of annual grasses. From their burrows they could hear the distinctive rattling sounds of male sharp-tailed grouse emanating from the birds' communal display site, which was situated on a low hill near the middle of the dog colony. Hearing that, they knew that no coyotes (*mashlecha*) or bobcats (*igmuhot*a) were likely to be near, and this fact gave them enough courage to begin peering out their burrow entrances.

For the sharp-tailed grouse (*shiocitkala*), which had used this location as a courtship arena for far more years than the very oldest of its participants, the hill-top location was perfect. This wind-swept site was one of the first locations in the entire colony to become snow-free in early spring. Furthermore, the dogs had kept the grasses clipped down to only a few inches high around the top of the ridge, which gave the grouse a panoramic view in every direction, leaving no opportunities for a coyote, bobcat, or even a large bull snake (*sintehla-wangleglega*) to approach without

being detected. Soaring hawks (*canska*) and golden eagles (*huya*) were quite another matter for the grouse, but these large and rather slow-flying raptors posed a much greater threat to the prairie dogs than to the sharp-eyed grouse.



The dry, sun-hardened soil below the display area had been stamped upon by hundreds if not thousands of sharp-tailed grouse during uncounted previous decades, as well as walked over by countless pronghorns (*tahheencha*) and long-dead bison (*tatanka*), so that when the birds collectively stamped their feet, a soft and low-pitched but still audible rumbling sound was produced. This noise was augmented with a louder rattling sound not very different from that of a rattlesnake (*sintehla-wagleza*), produced by their pointed tail feathers as they quickly rubbed over one another

from side to side when the birds alternately stamped their feet.

There were nearly twenty males assembled around the hilltop, which to the prairie dogs and a casual human observer might appear to have been randomly organized with respect to one another. But this was not the case. At the very crest of the rise was a single male, separated from the two or three nearest males by at least twenty to thirty feet, which in turn were spaced out at similar minimal distances from one another. Radiating out from these birds were the remaining somewhat scattered males, the entire assemblage roughly forming a circle, its imaginary center point being the male at the top of the rise. That particular male, seemingly identical in appearance to all the others, was the oldest in the group and was now approaching the end of his fourth year. He had regularly returned to this hill every year since the spring of his first year of life, when he first heard and saw the others gathered there and had been innately drawn toward them. Reaching the edge of the group, he was immediately threatened and attacked by the first male he encountered. He received similar treatment from every other male he approached. Finally, he accepted a position along the outer perimeter of the group, and began in turn to threaten other strange males that attempted to join the group.

During that first spring, the male carefully watched as the older and more experienced males regularly fought with one another, and he watched how, when-

ever one of the more centrally located birds failed to appear at its self-guarded location, its space would be quickly taken over by one of its nearest neighbors. Should the missing bird later reappear, he would have to try retain his former location by fighting, and would often win back much or all of his previous territory. However, other males sometimes disappeared permanently, and by this gradual process of attrition the participating males very slowly worked their way toward the center of the group.

By its third spring of life, the male had challenged and defeated many rivals, and now occupied a position with no other males between himself and the one at the very center of the group. From that position he could see every other male in the group and, more importantly, could also see every female that approached the display area.

Every morning at about an hour before sunrise, all the participating males would fly or walk to the rise and take up their established positions. Almost as soon as they arrived, each would begin his advertisement displays. Standing erect, a male would cock his tail and slightly lower his wings, while lifting his neck feathers enough to expose a purplish patch of skin on each side, and also exposing a variably enlarged eyebrow-like comb of yellow skin above each eye. In this posture the male would suddenly lower his head and cock his tail, uttering a dove-like cooing note that was both soft and low-pitched, but which carried well in all directions. As it called, the purplish neck skin was

quickly inflated and again deflated, and the wings were slightly spread. Each and all the males produced this cooing call repeatedly over the entire period of morning display, with little apparent regard for its timing in other males.

But cooing was not the high point of the group's display behavior. As more birds arrived to join the group, excitement built, and soon an animated dancing ritual began, involving all the males. This remarkable behavior, closely similar to the traditional dancing ceremonies of Plains Natives, began quite abruptly as every male lowered his head, spread his wings horizontally outward, raised his tail to the vertical, expanded his eye-brows, and exposed his purple neck skin. Then he began to stamp his feet strongly, each step slightly ahead of the next, so the bird moved erratically forward in an unpredictable pattern, sometimes turning completely about in small circles, and at other times moving ahead in a nearly straight line. With each foot-stamping movement, the longest tail feathers were shaken from side to side, their shafts snapping over one another in rapid sequence, and in concert with the foot-stamping producing a distinctive rattling noise.

As soon as a single male began this strange dance, he was joined by all the other nearby males, so that the visual effect was that of a bunch of wind-up toys suddenly set into wild activity. Then, as suddenly and as quickly as the dance had started, all the males would stop as if on cue and stand silent and motion-

less for several seconds, as if listening and looking for possible danger. Then, again without obvious cues, the dance would start again with renewed vigor. Dancing activity reached a peak frenzy whenever a female appeared on the scene. When dancing before a female, the male would often orient his entire body toward her, exposing his white-spangled upper back and wing pattern to her view, and with his vibrating tail feathers produce a mesmerizing sequence of brown and white flashes. Often a dancing male would try approach a nearby female from behind, especially if the female crouched and slightly extended her wings, providing a stable platform for the male to mount and mate with her.

Although several females sometimes visited the males in a single morning, they were highly selective. Nonchalantly walking past all of the males on the group's periphery, each would slowly make her way toward the top of the hill and eventually gravitate to the male at the very crest. It was only in front of that male, or rarely before those males immediately around him, that the female would crouch and thus invite mating. Once the mating act was over, the female would fly or walk away and begin seeking out a place among thicker grasses in which to make her nest and lay her clutch of eggs.

By now the cold mornings were regularly enlivened and warmed by the fluty melodies of western meadowlarks (*jialepa*), newly arrived from their wintering areas farther south, and the daytime skies were laced

THE CRANES RETURN TO PINE RIDGE

with skeins of white-bodied snow geese (*magasekse-cala*) and sandhill cranes (*pehangila*) pushing northwards. The cranes flew more slowly and in more ragged formations than did the geese, and their wild cries carried even farther than the dog-like yelps of the snow geese. There were still few ice-free places for the geese to land in the Pine Ridge, so they often turned east to the shallow lakes and marshes of the nearby sandhills.



For the sandhill cranes, the open fields and meadows of the Pine Ridge offered an attractive opportunity for taking at least a brief rest. Many flocks had left early one morning from their North Platte River staging area some 100 miles to the south, and they were headed for their next major staging area 200 miles to the north, in western North Dakota's Missouri Valley. However, strong north winds were making headway

difficult, and the juveniles in the flock were having difficulties keeping up with the older birds. So, after some hesitation and calling, the flock wheeled about and began a long circling descent. They landed in a wet meadow along a small creek, and all the birds immediately began to drink and preen. Most of the flock consisted of paired adults, some of whom were leading their last-year's offspring back north for the first time. The rest of the flock consisted of a few adults who had lost their mates as a result of the previous hunting season on their fall migration and the Texas wintering grounds. There were also some immature birds approaching two years of age who still associated with their parents, and a few three-year-olds who had yet to obtain mates. These birds had now fully abandoned their parental attachments and were trying to attract mates before they became scattered over the tundra nesting grounds.

The oldest and most experienced of the cranes had now flown this long and arduous migration for more than thirty years, and had committed the 4,000-mile route to their memories. Over time, the flock's younger members would also learn the same route, and in turn would pass it on to their own offspring. If all went well, in only two months they would cross the Bering Sea and reached their breeding grounds in the lush arctic tundras of northeastern Siberia.

THE CRANES RETURN TO PINE RIDGE



Elk stag

Chapter 13

May 2000: A Pine Ridge Spring

“Then [after the North-Wind] comes *He-yo-kah*, the South-Wind, also called the Fool-Wind, he who is the herald of the Thunder-Bird and causes all the trees and the plains to put on their garments of green.”

—*Wigwam Evenings*, C. A. Eastman & E. G. Eastman (1930)

On other parts of the dog colony, but near the edges, were several pairs of burrowing owls (*hinhan ilpahlot*). These tiny owls, weighing little more than a tenth of an adult prairie dog, are small enough to occupy an abandoned dog burrow and, with only slight renovation, turn it into a nesting site. In mid-April the birds had just returned from their wintering areas hundreds of miles to the south, where many pairs had become separated and dispersed, so many of the returning adults were occupied with relocating old mates or finding new ones. Additionally, some two-

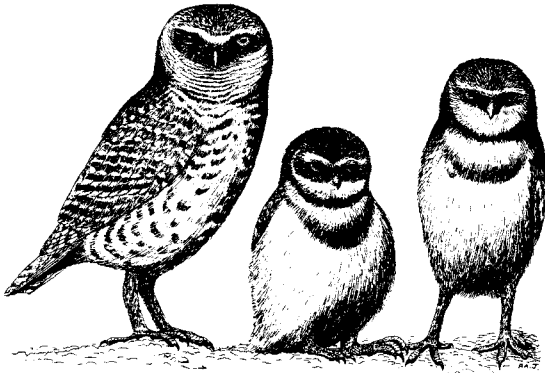


year-old birds, breeding for the first time, were now looking for their first mates.

In the middle of April, while the sharp-tailed grouse were busy with their dawn and dusk courtship, the male burrowing owls were also busy getting ready for breeding. Males began to occupy old or newly claimed burrows, excavating with their feet where needed and transporting dried mammal droppings to the burrow entrances. These were shredded and carefully spread around the burrow opening, perhaps to help hide their own scent from coyotes (*mashlecha*) or badgers (*hoka*). Each evening every male would stand by the entrance to its burrow, exposing the white patches on its face and throat, and uttering soft double cooing notes as it briefly bowed forward. During this time of year, the males would often sing throughout the night, especially those nights when the moon was bright. Unlike most owls, hunting for prey by burrowing owls is done during the day, for they have relatively poor hearing and poor nocturnal vision, at least as compared with the more highly nocturnal owls.

When the burrowing owls first arrived back on their nesting grounds, they fed mostly on mice, but with warming days and increased numbers of insects about, they rapidly shifted to catching large insects such as the dung beetles that are always common about prairie-dog colonies. These beetles are large, easy to capture, and perhaps are attracted to the smell of dung around the owls' nest cavities where they can be easily caught. Often, when a female approached an un-

mated male, he would leave on a quick foraging trip and return with a fresh food offering for her. Then, mutual billing ensued, followed by more food offerings, and finally by mating. Then the male uttered a special mating song, and the female responded with a musical warble.



Soon after their pair-bonds had become well established, the female owl began laying eggs. These were produced at the approximate rate of about one per day, until a clutch of eight rounded white eggs were present. Unlike the female grouse, who were also producing clutches at the same time but would not begin their incubation until the clutch was complete, the owl female began incubating her eggs as soon as they were laid. Because of this, the first egg would hatch in late May, about four weeks after it had been laid. The rest of the eggs would hatch sequentially on an approximate daily schedule. This meant that the last chick to

hatch would be more than a week younger than the first-hatched chick, putting it at a distinct size and strength disadvantage during competition for food items when they were brought in by the male.

During the female's month-plus incubation activities, she remained below ground and out of sight, requiring the male to obtain enough food both for himself and his mate, and later also enough for the newly hatched chicks. Usually his prey consisted of beetles, but at times he could catch an occasional mouse or kangaroo rat, as well as crickets and caterpillars, and rarely he would even catch a resting dragonfly. The male now hunted all day long, but especially around sunrise, near mid-day, and again near sunset.

As soon as the youngsters had grown enough to develop their own body heat and also had acquired larger appetites, the female began to join the male on his hunting forays. By then a new crop of baby mice and even baby prairie dogs were starting to become available, and these easily captured animals would help ease the problem of feeding so many hungry mouths.

The female sharp-tailed grouse were also busy nesting now. Most made their nests in the densest grassy cover that they could find, usually within a mile of the lek that they had visited for mating. One of the nearest to the male's display site was a female who had been one of the earliest to be mated. She had nested successfully twice previously and, now approaching three years of age, was highly experienced. Even be-

fore mating she had begun preparing a nest scrape, and within a few days of first visiting the males had been fertilized. Now, only two days later, she laid her first egg early in the morning, shortly after sunrise. Thereafter, over the next twelve days, she returned to her nest each morning, depositing a single egg with each visit. After each egg had been deposited, she partially covered the nest with feathers and grass, then left it untended until the next morning's visit.

Almost half of the untended grouse nests in the vicinity were discovered and their eggs consumed by snakes, coyotes, foxes, skunks, or other nest predators. Sometimes ravens (*kangi-tanka*) or crows (*kangi*) found and plundered the nests, and a few were crushed by deer and pronghorns. However, if her nest happened to be destroyed before her clutch had hatched, a female would occasionally start the process again by going back to the displaying males, getting refertilized, and beginning a new nest and clutch. For the lucky females whose nests remained intact, their chicks hatched about twenty-four days after incubation began. Then from ten to a dozen or more lively chicks would appear, almost as if by magic, and they would soon demand the female's total attention over the next two months.

Not far from the grouse nesting area were the territories of several long-billed curlew (*ticannica*), recently returned from their wintering grounds off the western coast of Mexico. The gracefully decurved bill of this large shorebird seemed too long for its body, up to

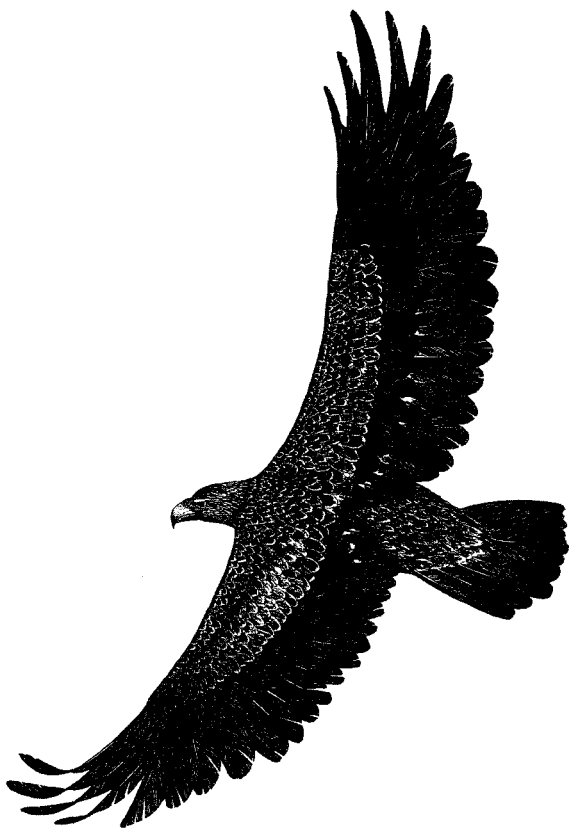


nearly nine inches in the females and about six inches in the smaller males. Both sexes had arrived back at their breeding grounds at about the same time, but the males had immediately begun establishing territories while the females busied themselves with restoring fat reserves that had been used up during migration. Some females quickly found their mates of the previous year and renewed their pair-bonds, but others, such as two-year-olds who were breeding for the first time and those who had lost their mates, were still unattached.

To define and defend his territory and to try to attract a mate, each morning the resident male curlew would take flight, and begin a prolonged flight covering several acres. He would ascend rapidly, then set his wings in a shallow arc and begin a gradual downward glide, while uttering a series of soft *kerr, kerr* notes. This would continue until he almost reached the ground, then he would rise to repeat the performance again and again. In this way the male drew attention to himself and his territory. At times he would also stand on a high point in his territory and utter loud, drawn-out *whieee* notes, also to try to lure females into his territory. Eventually a female responded by approaching and increasingly remaining within his territorial boundaries. Soon the male began showing the female potential nest sites in areas of shortgrasses by crouching and making rapid foot-scraping movements. After rejecting several of the male's choices, the female settled on one, and finished the simple nest by herself.

With the nest site selected, the male began an intensive courtship, repeatedly running toward the female with his head retracted and his wings slightly extended. He would then take up a position behind her, with his wings raised overhead and somewhat fluttered, exposing their rich cinnamon undersides. He then rubbed his head and bill over the female's shoulder and neck feathers, ruffling them, and attempted to mount her.

Over the next few days, matings regularly occurred, and the female produced a clutch of four eggs at roughly daily intervals. As soon as the clutch was completed, the male began to incubate them. Soon a regularly incubation schedule was established, the male incubating at night and the female by day. When not incubating, the male always stood guard from a nearby hilltop, and at the sight of any possible danger would take flight and begin diving at the intruder, screaming loudly. Usually his calls would attract other curlews from nearby territories, and as many as five or six birds might join in the noisy melee. By distracting the intruder, the birds would often make it retreat before it discovered the actual nest location.



Golden eagle, in flight

Chapter 14

June 2000: Mary Thunder: A Vision for the Future

But you can't live forever off the deeds of Sitting Bull or Crazy Horse. You can't wear their eagle feathers, freeload off their legends. You have to make your own legends now.

—Mary Crow Dog & R. Erdoes,
Lakota Woman (1990)

For Mary Thunder, the granddaughter of Jimmy Fox, this summer was an important time. She was now seventeen years old, a young woman. When she had turned twelve, she had asked her mother, June Thunder, to help research and arrange to perform the Lakota's traditional buffalo ceremony for her. This ancient ritual once ensured the young women who performed it would become industrious and conduct worthy lives as they matured. However, June learned that the ceremony had not been performed since the

1920s, and its details had long since been forgotten. Nevertheless, Mary believed that at least learning about such traditional Lakota ceremonies would help put her in touch with her historic culture, and perhaps connect her with her ancestors, of whom she wished to know more.

Mary knew that her mother was the only surviving child of her grandfather, Jimmy Fox, who died long before she was born. He had frozen to death on a long winter walk from Wounded Knee Creek to Pine Ridge village. He was braving a blizzard to get some medicine for his pregnant wife, Helen, who was then seriously ill with pneumonia. Helen survived her illness, gave birth to June, and raised her alone. Mary's mother, June, married Frank Thunder, who was a mixed-blood working on various construction jobs in Pine Ridge. While Mary was still a small child, Frank had died of alcohol-related disease.

Like most people her age, Mary spoke or understood only a small amount of Lakota when she began her freshman year at Pine Ridge High School in 1997. The modern high school had been built in 1995, and as a carryover of its historic boarding-school background, housed both boys and girls from throughout the reservation in dormitories. Mary slept in one of the dorms and enrolled for classes in the Lakota language, as well as in fine arts and biology. Mary tried out for the girls' basketball team, the Lady Thorpes, but in spite of being tall for her age and agile, she failed to make the team her freshman year.

Mary also took sewing and weaving classes during her sophomore year and made a beautiful blue woolen shawl for herself that she planned to wear during the school's annual *Omniciye Wacipi* (pow wow). It was mostly blue, which as Mary had learned in class is a Lakota symbol of the heavens. At its corners she wove triangles of deep red, a traditional Lakota color of holiness. Mary inserted at intervals along its edges twelve sewn-in tail feathers of a blue jay that she had found dead, with their intricate patterns of blue, black, and white that were her mother's favorite colors. Mary didn't know at first what kind of bird it was that she had found, but was able to look it up in a library reference book.

Seeing so many beautiful colored pictures of birds in the school's library books, Mary set about the task of trying to see how many she could find personally. Some were easy, such as the crows and starlings that were common around the village of Pine Ridge, but the sparrows proved more difficult, especially since Mary didn't have a telescope or binoculars. However, she quickly decided she could sketch them in pencil, and then bring her drawings back to the school library to compare and match them with illustrations in the school's reference books. This forced her to look closely at details such as beak shapes, tail lengths and shapes, and overall plumage patterns. She also learned to listen for distinctive calls and songs that might help her with identification, and to note the kind of habitat where she saw each bird. Before long she had a list

of twenty-five bird species that she had seen, sketched, and identified, all within walking distance of Pine Ridge High School.

As her sketchbook and list of identified birds grew, Mary's goals enlarged. On every weekend day she would walk or catch rides to the places around town where she thought new birds might be seen, and especially to White Clay Creek just west of town where the trees growing along its edges sometimes seemed alive with unfamiliar birds and their songs. Gradually her hikes and her bird list became longer and her sketchbook thicker. Soon she replaced her graphite pencil with a set of colored pencils in order to record colors directly without having to describe them. One day she met a tourist who took interest in what she was doing and gave her a pocket-sized field guide to birds, illustrating all the birds of the western states, the very thing she needed to help confirm her judgments. She also convinced her science teacher to put up a bird feeder just outside the class window to get even closer and longer views of the birds that visited.

After her high school term ended in early June, Mary was even freer to roam in her ever more single-minded search for new birds. It was only a two-mile hike from Pine Ridge to White Clay Lake, an impoundment of White Clay Creek straddling the South Dakota-Nebraska border. Here she could watch Canada geese and a variety of ducks. She sometimes saw occasional flights of white pelicans as they came in on foraging flights from nesting grounds on sandhills

marshes far to the east. She loved to lay on her back as she watched the flocks of the pelicans swirling lazily high above her in the brilliant sunshine, soaring higher and higher on invisible thermals of rising air, until they finally turned and disappeared over the eastern horizon on their way back to feed their hungry chicks from their fish-filled gullets. She learned to recognize the unearthly sounds of pied-billed grebes, but it took some time before she was able to locate the dumpy little birds that were responsible for these strange noises. On a few occasions she also saw an elegant great blue heron standing silently at the edge of the lake, waiting for an unwary frog to surface nearby. She decided that the most beautiful bird she saw at White Clay Lake was a male wood duck, swimming proudly in front of his mate and showing off his long and iridescent violet crest, but with the female paying no apparent attention. All of these scenes found their way into her ever-expanding sketchbook.

One day, talking with her mother about her latest bird observations, June said that when she was a child, her mother, Helen Fox, had told a story about her husband, Jimmy. Jimmy had said that as a youngster he had once made a pilgrimage into the Badlands to see a nesting golden eagle. June didn't know the details of her father's adventure, but did know that one of his prized possessions was a tattered eagle feather that he had worn in his hat. Jimmy had told his wife that when he died, he wanted to be buried with it under-

neath an ancient cottonwood tree beside Wounded Knee Creek.

The story of Jimmy Fox and the golden eagle aroused Mary's imagination. She had never seen a golden eagle, but knew that they were considered to be sacred birds by the Lakotas. One of the books in the school library was a breeding bird atlas for South Dakota birds. Looking up the golden eagle, Mary found that the only recent breeding record for the western part of the Pine Ridge reservation was for Slim Butte, about eighteen miles west of Pine Ridge village. The butte was located about three miles west of the White River and should be an easy one-day trip on her bike. A hardtop road would take her within a few miles of the butte, and she would hike in the rest of the way.

Early the next morning Mary made a few sandwiches, filled a quart canning jar with water, and tied her sketchbook to the handlebars of her bike. She then headed west on the BIA road out of town. She had never been west of White Clay Creek, so she stopped at Big Bat's Texaco station to pick up a South Dakota road map and a candy bar. With the morning sun on her back and a light breeze out of the northwest, Mary was filled with pleasure and anticipation. On both sides of the road meadowlarks were singing, lark buntings were sky-dancing, and prairie dogs ducked down out of sight as she rode by. She also passed some fenced-in areas where the prairie dogs had recently been poisoned. In these areas there were no meadowlarks, lark buntings, or prairie dogs, and far too many cattle had

grazed the ground bare, transforming the land into a featureless moonscape.

In less than an hour Mary could see she was coming to a small, tree-lined river, which from her map she knew must be the White River. Indeed, its waters were a turbid gray from sediments it was carrying out of the overgrazed grasslands of western Nebraska. Crossing a bridge, Mary looked to the west, and could see a tall, isolated butte about four miles away. She knew this must be Slim Butte, and also knew she would have to follow a winding and unmarked road the rest of the way. When she was within a mile of the butte, she decided to leave her bike and walk the remaining distance. As she did, Mary watched closely to avoid stepping on cactus or disturbing a rattlesnake. She was entranced by the milk-white blooms of yuccas and by the yellow heads of western wallflowers. She noticed the small, sky-blue blossoms of penstemons, which she had learned were once used by her ancestors to make blue paint for decorating moccasins and clothing.

As Mary got closer to the butte, she saw that it did indeed have a large stick nest perched halfway up its slope, and a golden eagle was soaring above! Mary decided not to approach any closer. She sat down among the wildflowers and absorbed the wonderful view before her. Squinting her eyes, Mary could see that the nest contained two half-grown eaglets. During the next few hours, Mary watched as one of the birds came back from a hunting trip with a small prey, apparently

a prairie dog, to feed to the young. The prairie dog was quickly torn into small pieces by the larger eagle at the nest and fed to each of the youngsters. Then, the smaller eagle left the nest and headed out again, flying almost directly over Mary and screaming at it did. She sketched the changing events as rapidly as she could, wanting to fix the moments in her memory forever.

Several times during the day the eagle returned with more food, usually a cottontail or prairie dog, quickly passing it on to its mate and leaving again without stopping long enough to eat anything. As the late afternoon sun began to hide the eastern slope of the butte in shadows, Mary regretfully decided it was time to leave so that she could be home before it became too dark. When she got back to her bike, she looked back at the butte one last time. Its tapered shape reminded her of a tipi. The western sky beyond was turning a golden orange. Lingering for one last look, Mary imagined she could see an eagle circling high above, proclaiming to the world that this is the land of the eagles. Mary now understood why the Lakotas had always honored and protected them, and why they had worn their feathers with intense pride. Mary also somehow knew that her day's experience would impart in her something of the eagle's own spirit of freedom.

With these thoughts in mind as she bicycled back toward Pine Ridge, Mary decided that she must somehow honor the eagle, the prairie dogs, and the all other

animals that had brightened her life the past few years. She would make a series of drawings that might be framed and hung in her high school library, and would make a list of all the birds she had seen and where they occurred, so that as other children came though the school, they too could learn about them and eventually might help to preserve them and their habitats. That night Mary dreamt of her day with the eagles. Oddly enough, as she thought about her dream the next day, she remembered that as the eagle flew by overhead in her dream, it was missing one tail feather.



Pronghorn male

Appendix I

A Timeline of the Lakotas and Their Land, 1849–2007

1849: The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is formed within the Department of Interior, taking authority over Native American affairs from War Department. Gold is discovered in California. An epidemic of Asian cholera is brought into the Great Plains by white emigrants on the Overland Trail.

1851: The Treaty of Fort Laramie (“Horse Creek Treaty” of Dakotas) promises Dakotas and Cheyennes fair treatment in land disputes and offers \$50,000 in annual provisions, in exchange for agreeing to keep the peace and allow construction of military roads and forts in the northern Great Plains.

1852: Annual numbers of westbound emigrants and prospectors crossing Platte Valley peak at about 50,000.

1854: Nebraska Territory (encompassing all of present-day Nebraska and South Dakota, and most of North Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana) is established by the Kansas-Nebraska Act, encouraging settlement

APPENDIX 1

across northern plains. Brule Dakotas kill Lieutenant John Grattan and twenty-nine soldiers in an August battle ("Grattan Massacre") near Fort Laramie (present-day eastern Wyoming), during which Brule leader Conquering Bear is also killed.

1855: Initial military exploration of Black Hills is led by Lieutenant G. K. Warren. Military road is built from Fort Pierre (present-day central South Dakota) to Fort Laramie (present-day southeastern Wyoming). A reprisal attack on September 3 for the 1854 Fort Laramie battle led by Colonel William Harney kills about eighty-five Brule men, women, and children at Little Thunder's village at Blue Water Creek, North Platte Valley (present-day western Nebraska).

1856: Fort Randall is established on Missouri River (present-day southern South Dakota) to help protect river traffic.

1858: Gold is discovered in Rocky Mountains, sending a wave of prospectors and emigrants west across the Platte Valley.

1861: Dakota Territory is established (regional 1860 census population 4,837, excluding unreported numbers of Native Americans), encompassing present-day Dakotas, Montana, and northern Wyoming. Start of Civil War.

APPENDIX 1

1862: “Great Sioux Uprising” in Minnesota leads to public hanging of thirty-eight Santee Dakota insurgents. Homestead Act passed, opening the West to settlement.

1863. Gold is discovered at Alder Gulch, Montana, producing a new influx of prospectors. Bozeman Trail is established between Julesburg (present-day northeastern Colorado) and Montana gold fields, crossing traditional Dakota and Cheyenne buffalo hunting grounds in Powder River Valley (present-day northeastern Wyoming).

1864: Montana Territory is established, encompassing approximate current state boundaries. Drought and grasshopper plagues are widespread across northern plains. Sand Creek Massacre on November 28 by Colonel J. Chivington’s troops slaughters more than a hundred Cheyenne men, women, and children camped under a flag of truce near Fort Lyon (present-day eastern Colorado).

1865: Union Pacific Railroad begins construction west along Platte River Valley from Omaha. End of Civil War brings thousands of veterans to western frontier, many becoming bison hunters.

1866: Fort Phil Kearny, Fort Reno, and Fort C. F. Smith are established along Bozeman Trail to protect route to Montana gold fields. After repeated white in-

APPENDIX 1

cursions into Native hunting lands, a Dakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho war party led by Red Cloud and Crazy Horse kill eighty-one soldiers in Fetterman Battle (the Dakota's "Battle of the Hundred in the Hand") near Fort Phil Kearny (present-day eastern Wyoming). Passage of 14th Amendment grants citizenship to Afro-Americans, but not to Native Americans (see 1924 entry).

1867: Nebraska is granted statehood. Federal government decides to end the costly effort to keep the Bozeman Trail open and sues for peace with Dakotas.

1868: Wyoming Territory is established along modern state boundaries. Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 promises Dakotas ownership of Black Hills and establishes a Great Sioux Reservation west of Missouri River. Natives are promised annual supplies of clothing, cloth, knives, and guns. Bison hunting rights are promised Dakotas on unceded lands between the 43rd and 46th latitudes west to Bighorn Mountains (present-day Wyoming). Limited hunting rights are also extended south to the Republican River. Red Cloud Agency is established on North Platte River (present-day eastern Wyoming). Reservation-based schooling is promised for children for at least twenty years. Bozeman Trail and associated army posts are abandoned by military under Fort Laramie Treaty's provisions. Lieutenant Colonel George Custer ambushes a peaceful Cheyenne village near Washita River (present-day southern Okla-

APPENDIX 1

homa), killing Chief Black Kettle and an estimated one hundred villagers.

1869: Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads meet in Utah, splitting Great Plains bison population into separate northern and southern segments, bringing thousands of hide hunters into central Plains and facilitating a slaughter of up to ten million bison over the next decade. Breech-loading repeating rifles are gradually replacing slower muzzle-loading types.

1870: Non-Native population of South Dakota's portion of Dakota Territory reaches 11,776; the Native population is undocumented.

1871: Congress decides to sign no more treaties with Native Americans, and refuses to view them as constituting separate nations but instead views them as wards of the federal government.

1872–1874: Peak of bison slaughter, with about 3.7 million killed by hunters over three years, with more than 95 percent killed by non-Native hide and meat hunters. W. F. ("Buffalo Bill") Cody personally kills 4,280 bison in eighteen months.

1873: Oglala Lakota's Red Cloud Agency is moved from North Platte River (present-day eastern Wyoming) to upper White River (northwestern Nebraska). Brule Lakota's Spotted Tail Agency is moved

from Fort Randall (present-day south-central South Dakota) to Beaver Creek (northwestern Nebraska). Army adopts .45-70 Springfield cartridge-based repeating rifle as standard issue.

1874: Gold is discovered during George Custer's Seventh Cavalry exploratory expedition to Black Hills. Camp Robinson (renamed Fort Robinson in 1878) is established at Red Cloud Agency, along upper White River (northwestern Nebraska) to monitor activities of Oglalas and Brules.

1875: Start of Black Hills gold rush with 15,000 prospectors flooding the Black Hills. First federal offer to buy the Black Hills from the Dakotas is rejected. Dakotas are ordered to move into reservations by January 31, 1876, or suffer military reprisals and starvation.

1876: The "Indian Problem" is turned over to the War Department. Lieutenant Colonel George Custer is killed and Seventh Cavalry defeated at Battle of the Rosebud (June 17) and Battle of Little Bighorn (June 25-26), the Dakota's "Battle of Greasy Grass," in present-day southeastern Montana. The cavalry has 265 dead and 52 wounded, and there is an estimated loss of about 30 Dakotas and Cheyennes. Sitting Bull's Hunkpapa Dakotas are defeated at Ash Creek (present-day Montana). In retribution, the Black Hills region and westernmost South Dakota Territory are excluded from the

Great Sioux Reservation by Congress, revoking a major provision of 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, and leaving a reservation of 34,145 square miles. Government rations are limited to adults who “labor” and to children between the ages of six and fourteen who regularly attend school.

1877: General Nelson Miles attacks an Oglala camp, but Crazy Horse escapes. Sitting Bull and 900 Hunkpapas retreat to Canada. Crazy Horse and his Oglala band surrender at Fort Robinson, May 7. General George Crook orders jailing of Crazy Horse, September 2. Crazy Horse is arrested without a fight at Spotted Tail (Brule) Agency, returned to Fort Robinson, and is killed there September 5. Red Cloud Agency is moved to White Clay and Yellow Medicine creeks along Missouri River (present-day South Dakota), only to moved again in 1878–79 to Pine Ridge. The Sioux Act of 1877 proclaims federal government ownership of the Black Hills, abrogating its 1868 Fort Laramie treaty.

1878–79: About 15,000 Lakotas are removed by military from Fort Robinson area and relocated in newly established Pine Ridge Agency (Oglala) and Rosebud Agency (Brule). They are joined by Red Cloud’s group from the Missouri River, making a total Pine Ridge Reservation population of about 6,000.

APPENDIX 1

1879: Fort Niobrara Military Reservation is established along Niobrara River (north-central Nebraska) to protect region from incursions by Dakotas. Sixty Cheyennes are killed at Fort Robinson when they try to escape and return to their homeland. An Indian Agency dormitory school, the Oglala Indian Trading School, is built at Pine Ridge village, and 110 wooden houses are built in the Pine Ridge Reservation. The federal government begins a Contract School system of paying religious institutions to train young Native Americans for life on reservations. The Episcopal and Catholic churches are chosen for “civilizing” the Oglalas and Brules.

1880: Non-Native population of South Dakota’s portion of Dakota Territory reaches 98,268; Native numbers are undocumented. Sitting Bull and a few hundred surviving Dakotas return from Canada to surrender at Fort Burford (present-day northwestern North Dakota). Last of Brule Lakotas are removed from Camp Sheridan (northwestern Nebraska) to Rosebud Agency (present-day southwestern South Dakota). About 350 houses are now occupied in the Pine Ridge Reservation.

1881: Red Cloud is deposed as chief of the Sioux by Pine Ridge’s Indian Agent, V. T. McGillicuddy, who establishes a fifty-man reservation police force to maintain law and order.

APPENDIX 1

1882: Last major northern buffalo herd is eliminated near Black Hills. A five-mile no-alcohol-sales buffer along the Nebraska border is established by presidential executive order. Six Indian Agency day schools are built on the Pine Ridge Reservation, and about 550 reservation houses are occupied.

1883: Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad penetrates west to the central Niobrara Valley, opening upper Niobrara Valley region to homesteading. Dakota Territory passes a law protecting bison. Sitting Bull is transferred to Standing Rock Agency (present-day South Dakota). Last documented nineteenth-century Oglala Sun Dance is held on Pine Ridge Reservation. Federal government bans the practice of tribal religious practices such as the Sun Dance and other “heathenish rites and customs.” About 650 houses are occupied in the Pine Ridge Reservation, an average density about ten reservation Natives per house.

1884: End of commercial bison hunting. Bones of nearly six million bison are collected by a single salvage company between 1884 and 1891 to be ground and used for fertilizer. A federal Court of Indian Offenses is formed to punish illegal activities such as Sun Dances and activities of medicine men. A freight road is completed from Valentine (Nebraska) to Porcupine Creek, and six day schools are operating at the Pine Ridge Reservation.

APPENDIX 1

1885. The Major Crimes Act gives federal courts jurisdiction over serious crimes committed on Indian reservations.

1886: Chicago & Northwestern Railroad connects Rapid City and Chadron, Nebraska, opening the Black Hills to settlement. William Hornaday kills twenty-five bison in eastern Montana for a New York museum exhibit, all that he could locate during months of hunting. Droughts and severe winters become widespread in the Great Plains over next decade. Compulsory education is required by Congress for all Native children between six and fourteen years of age.

1887: Dawes Severalty (General Allotment) Act is passed, giving acreage allotments and subsequent inheritance of reservation lands to individual Natives, the eventual sale of “excess” reservation lands to whites, and granting citizenship to all Natives who accept reservation allotments. Reservation acreages are offered to adult male tribal heads of households, but few Oglalas agree to accept these allotments. Use of Native language is prohibited in all government-run schools.

1888: Last wild bison and elk are shot in Dakota Territory. The Holy Rosary Mission, a boarding school run by the Jesuits and Franciscan Sisters, is built near Pine Ridge Agency village, with a maximum capacity of 200 children.

1889: South and North Dakota are granted statehood. Congress's "Great Sioux Agreement" divides the Great Sioux Reservation in six separate and collectively substantially smaller (by eleven million acres) reservations in western South Dakota and adjacent North Dakota, the resulting excess lands to be made available for sale at fifty cents to one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. The Black Hills are excluded from the reservations and officially opened for settlement. Drought and economic depression become widespread across northern Great Plains. Diseases such as tuberculosis are rampant on Great Plains reservations during winter of 1889–1890. William Hornaday estimates that fewer than one hundred wild bison might exist in the U.S.

1890: Wyoming is granted statehood. Modern Great Plains reservations become organized, with tribal courts and Indian police forces established. The last wild grizzly bear is killed in South Dakota, and gray wolves disappear from the northern plains at about the same time. Last Lakota Ghost Dance is performed in the Badlands Stronghold Table. Sitting Bull is murdered December 15, while confined at Standing Rock Agency. Massacre at Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, when Seventh Cavalry kills Minneconjou Chief Big Foot, at least 90 men and probably more than 200 women and children. About twenty-five soldiers are killed, many by accidental crossfire. South Dakota's census population is 348,808.

APPENDIX 1

1891: Last free-living Oglalas surrender at Pine Ridge Agency, bringing all Dakotas into reservation confinement. Total Dakota reservation population is reported as 16,426.

1892: Federal government prohibits sale of liquor to Native Americans. A tribal Oglala Council is established at Pine Ridge Reservation.

1893: Yellowstone Park bison herd is estimated at twenty animals, the last wild herd known to exist in the U.S. The Pine Ridge Oglala Trading School is destroyed by fire.

1894: Tuberculosis epidemic on Pine Ridge Reservation. Deaths total 285, or 3.5 percent of reservation population.

1895: Fifth year of a severe drought requires that federal government provide all of Pine Ridge Reservation's food needs, a situation that prevails until 1900.

1897: The federal Black Hills Forest Reserve is established on Black Hills lands claimed by the Oglalas. A new Pine Ridge School (later to become the Pine Ridge High School) is built to replace the prior Agency boarding school, which burned in 1893. Federal government is spending sixty-seven dollars annually per child (eighteen cents per day) to educate 773 Pine Ridge children.

APPENDIX 1

1898: The north end of Pine Ridge Reservation is fenced to help reduce illegal grazing by white ranchers.

1900: South Dakota's census population is 401,570. Pine Ridge Reservation population is estimated at about 8,000. Bureau of Indian Affairs cuts off rations from 1,850 Oglala tribal members who are mixed-bloods or whites.

1902: Congress passes initial legislation allowing the sale of Native lands that had been allotted or inherited under 1887 Dawes Act. Bureau of Indian Affairs cuts off rations from all able-bodied but nonworking Oglala tribal members, unless they agree to work for one dollar and twenty-five cents per day and cut their hair.

1903: Wind Cave National Park is established in the southern Black Hills.

1904: Unallocated portions of Rosebud Reservation are opened for homesteading to settlers and sale to speculators. Kincaid Act encourages homesteading arid regions of northern and western Nebraska by offering substantially larger (640-acre) individual land allotments than had been allowed in original Homestead Act (160 acres).

APPENDIX 1

1906: The Burke Act allows sale of Native-owned allotment lands to whites by “competent” Indians. The act also defines competency.

1907: Unallocated portions of Brule’s Rosebud Reservation is opened for sale to whites. Indian Appropriations Act allows “noncompetent Indians” to sell both their allotted and inherited lands to whites, making all ceded Indian lands subject to sale. The Black Hills Forest Reserve (established in 1897) is renamed Black Hills National Forest.

1908–1909: Unallocated portions (nearly half) of Standing Rock and Cheyenne River reservations opened for acquisition by whites by House Indian Affairs Committee.

1909: Last known sighting of Audubon’s bighorn sheep occurs in White River Badlands; this subspecies is later judged to be extinct.

1909–1911: Drought years in South Dakota. South Dakota’s 1910 census population is 583,888. The federal Indian Health Program begins.

1911: Pine Ridge Reservation is reduced by exclusion of Bennett County. Rosebud Reservation is similarly reduced by exclusion of Mellette County, with both areas then opened for acquisition by whites.

APPENDIX 1

1912: Elk are reintroduced into Black Hills.

1913: Bison are reintroduced into Black Hills.

1914–1918: World War I. Over 9,000 Native Americans serve, more than half as volunteers and only a quarter recognized as U.S. citizens. Proportionately, far more Indians enter military service than whites.

1915: Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioner decrees that all full-blooded and mixed-breed Natives twenty-one years old or older and judged to be competent may sell their land to whites. South Dakota repeals a law that had allowed Natives to attend its white schools.

1917: A new federal policy liberalizes the granting of whites title to Native American lands. About 45 percent of Pine Ridge Reservation men are judged to be self-supporting.

1918–1919. World War I ends. Worldwide influenza pandemic kills fifty million people. High mortality rates occur across all of North America, especially on Indian reservations.

1919–1920: Fort Robinson is demobilized; postwar economic depression; drought spreads across northern Great Plains. Citizenship is granted to all Native American veterans of World War I.

APPENDIX 1

1920: Lakotas obtain legal permission to sue federal government for lands lost from Great Sioux Reservation in 1889, including the Black Hills. South Dakota's census population is 636,547.

1922: Many reservation lands are sold to whites, owing to postwar depression loan foreclosures, tax-delinquency sales, and fraud. Within thirteen years, two-thirds of the Rosebud Reservation would be under white ownership, as well as about half of all U.S. reservation lands. Rocky Mountain race of bighorn sheep is reintroduced into Black Hills, to replace extinct Audubon's bighorn.

1924: U.S. citizenship is given to women, and to all Native Americans born in the United States, although some states withhold Native American voting rights until 1948 (see also 1866, 1887, 1919–1920).

1928: Merriam Commission (Brooking Institution) reports on educational failures and appalling conditions on Indian reservations. Per capita annual income at Pine Ridge is estimated at eighty-six dollars.

1929: Badlands National Monument is established at north end of Pine Ridge Reservation. First publicly acknowledged Sun Dance since the 1880s is held at Pine Ridge. A national bison survey reports 3,385 animals in the U.S.

APPENDIX 1

1930–1940: Decade of Great Depression. South Dakota's census population reaches a high point of 692,849 in 1930, a population level not attained again until 1980. Droughts, hot summers, and cold winters become widespread across Great Plains, causing massive outward emigration of failed homesteaders.

1933: First bison are returned to Pine Ridge Reservation, initiating its captive herd.

1933–1934: “Indian New Deal” is begun under FDR, including the Johnson-O'Malley Act and the Wheeler-Howard or Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), allowing tribal control, promoting financial independence for individual tribes, and stopping sales of reservation lands to whites. The Court of Indian Affairs is abolished and is replaced by local tribal governments. Sun Dances are officially recognized as legal; their administration is taken over by the newly established Oglala Sioux Tribal Council.

1935: Lakotas narrowly vote to accept new tribal constitution under IRA provisions.

1936: Hottest summer and coldest winter in Dakotas' history; widespread dust storms across Great Plains.

1938: Badlands National Monument is established to the north of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

APPENDIX 1

1940: South Dakota's census population is 642,961, a reduction of 7.2 percent during the previous decade, reflecting the economic effects of 1930s drought.

1941: Mount Rushmore National Memorial is completed in the Black Hills on a granite peak named after William S. Harney (the Lakota's "Mad Bear"), who had led a ruthless attack on a Brule village at Blue Water Creek in 1885.

1941–1945: Over 25,000 Native Americans serve in military during World War II.

1942–1970: Northern part of Pine Ridge Reservation (Cuny Tableland) is used for bombing and gunnery practice by U.S. Air Force and South Dakota National Guard.

1944: National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is formed. U.S. Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation propose construction of five main-stem Missouri River flood-control and hydroelectric dams and reservoirs (the Pick-Sloan Plan). These eventually flood 202,000 acres of tribal lands in North and South Dakota, displace 900 families, and destroy 90 percent of reservation timberland and arable bottomlands.

1945: Congress authorizes the sale of reservation lands acquired by individual Natives through inheritance.

APPENDIX 1

1946: Federal Indian Claims Commission is established for hearing tribal land claims against the federal government.

1948–1953: The Indian Relocation Program is established to move tribal members into cities and reduce reservation populations.

1950: Lakotas file claim to the Black Hills under provisions of the Indian Claims Commission. South Dakota census population is 652,740. Natives comprise 3.4 percent of South Dakota population. National bison survey totals 9,252 animals in U.S.

1952: Traditional versions of the Sun Dance are recognized as legal.

1955: Annual public Sun Dance performances are initiated at Pine Ridge village.

1956: Gavins Point and Fort Randall dams are completed in South Dakota.

1957: Reservation termination policy is adopted by Congress (Public Law 280), a law intended to eliminate all Indian reservations gradually.

1960: South Dakota's census population is 680,514. Natives comprise 3.7 percent of state population. Shannon County's estimated reservation population is

APPENDIX 1

6,000. Body piercing during Pine Ridge's Sun Dance is performed for the recorded first time in the twentieth century.

1961: Bear Butte State Park is established at Bear Butte (*Mato Paha*), a sacred Lakota and Cheyenne promontory east of the Black Hills.

1964: Remnant population of critically endangered black-footed ferret is discovered in Mellette County, which had been a part of Pine Ridge Reservation until 1911. Oahe Dam is completed.

1966: The last of six Pick-Sloan project dams (Big Bend) on Missouri River is completed. Dakota tribes are later awarded \$34 million dollars in damages for dams' impounded lands, property destruction, and general social disruption, an amount equal to about \$170 per acre.

1968: American Indian Movement (AIM) is formed.

1969: The Holy Rosary Mission of Pine Ridge is renamed the Pine Ridge Indian School.

1970: Federal reservation termination policy is officially abandoned. South Dakota's census population is 665,507, a decline of 2.2 percent during prior decade. Natives comprise 6 percent of state's population. Shannon County's reservation population is 8,198.

APPENDIX 1

1973: Buddy Lamont and Frank Clearwater of AIM are killed by FBI agents during seventy-one-day occupation of Wounded Knee. The occupation is the longest armed conflict in the U.S. since the Civil War, costing the government over \$7 million. Bureau of Indian Affairs police later kill Pedro Bissonette, also of AIM, and 185 Natives are indicted on various charges, but nearly all are acquitted.

1975: Two FBI agents and one Lakota are killed at Oglala during Indian Movement rebellion. Black-footed ferret population in South Dakota dies out; the species is believed extinct in wild. The U.S. Bicentennial is celebrated.

1977: Leonard Peltier is convicted of killing two FBI agents at Oglala in 1975. He is sentenced to two lifetimes in prison, the conviction based on highly questionable evidence. Bureau of Indian Affairs police system is replaced with tribal police forces.

1978: Badlands National Monument is redesignated as Badlands National Park, and expanded to incorporate the northern part of Pine Ridge Reservation. American Indian Freedom of Religion Act is enacted, legalizing traditional tribal ceremonies. Indian Child Welfare Act is passed. Indian Claims Commission is abolished.

1979: South Dakota's Department of Environmental Protection is abolished.

1980: U.S. Supreme Court concludes that the Great Sioux Nation is entitled to payment for the illegal taking of the Black Hills. Lakotas refuse \$122 million settlement (\$17.5 million plus interest) offered by federal government as compensation. South Dakota's census population reaches 690,000. Natives comprise about 7 percent of state's population.

1980–1984: About 458,000 acres of prairie dog colonies are poisoned on Pine Ridge Reservation, possibly killing as many as five million prairie dogs, a population assumption based on a conservative estimate of ten prairie dogs per acre.

1981: Remnant population of black-footed ferrets is discovered in central Wyoming. Breeding program later begins using seven captured animals.

1982: Ronald Reagan administration slashes appropriations of most reservation operating funds.

1985–1987: About 240,000 acres of prairie dog colonies on Pine Ridge Reservation are repoisoned by Bureau of Indian Affairs, leaving about 57,000 acres of active colonies.

1988: Indian Gaming Regulatory Act permits gambling on reservations under compact agreements in some states; planning and construction of casinos on South Dakota reservations begins.

APPENDIX 1

1990: South Dakota's census population reaches 698,000.

1990–1994: About 268,000 acres of prairie dog colonies are poisoned on Pine Ridge Reservation, the colony acreage being reduced by about 87 percent over five years.

1994–1995: Restoration efforts of endangered black-footed ferret begin in Badlands National Park (Conata Basin) and adjoining Buffalo Gap National Grassland, using animals bred from Wyoming's relict population.

1997: A prairie-dog poisoning program begins in Wind Cave National Park, where all animals and plants are supposed to be wholly protected.

1998: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is petitioned by conservation groups to list black-tailed prairie dog as nationally threatened. Poisoning on federal lands is halted and conservation plans are requested from eleven Great Plains states. South Dakota's prairie-dog range is calculated at 245,000 acres, about 14 percent of state's original estimated historic range.

1999: Multiyear drought begins on the Great Plains. President Bill Clinton visits Pine Ridge Reservation, promising economic assistance. Federal escrow compensation offer for Lakota's loss of Black Hills lands exceeds \$500 million (see also entries for 1868, 1876–

APPENDIX 1

77, 1920, 1950, and 1980). Two Pine Ridge Natives are beaten to death near the Nebraska state line north of White Clay village, where liquor sales at four establishments amount to several million dollars annually. The murders remained unsolved as of 2007.

2000: George W. Bush is elected president, and his administration immediately begins to dismantle federal environmental protections. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service concludes that a nationally “threatened” status of black-tailed prairie dog is “warranted but precluded.” South Dakota’s census population reaches 736,900; Shannon County’s reservation population reaches 12,600. Total U.S. population of Dakotas (“Sioux”) passes 150,000.

2002: Oglala Lakotas protest National Park Service’s excavations of fossils found on the Badlands Stronghold Table, sacred grounds of Oglalas, and the site of their final Ghost Dance in 1890.

2003: Farm bill subsidies totaling more than \$582,000 between 1995 and 2003 are awarded to fifteen landowners for grazing and farming in Conata Basin of Buffalo Gap National Grassland, in addition to their receiving federally subsidized land grazing rights and government-sponsored prairie-dog poisoning. Eleven Indian casinos are operating in South Dakota.

2004: Nebraska Legislature proposes but fails to pass a five-mile buffer zone preventing liquor sales at White Clay, a fourteen-person village bordering Pine Ridge Reservation, where 12,500 cans of beer are sold daily, representing about \$3.8 million in annual sales. Bush administration relaxes many conservation and antipollution laws, removes black-tailed prairie dog as candidate for federal protection in August. Prairie-dog poisoning begins within weeks on 32,000 acres of private and federal lands in Jackson, Pennington, and Fall River counties, at taxpayers' cost of \$236,000. National Museum of the American Indian opens in Washington, D.C., highlighting traditional Dakota culture.

2005: About sixty private landowners in southwest South Dakota file federal suit for \$5 million for losses caused by prairie dogs on private lands adjoining Buffalo Gap National Grassland. U.S. Forest Service announces new prairie-dog management plan in November, expanding use of poisons and prairie-dog hunting on two national grasslands in Nebraska and South Dakota.

2007. The U.S. Forest Service unveils a new plan to poison prairie dogs in federal grasslands of southwestern South Dakota, including in Conata Basin, the only surviving well-established ferret population. Four conservation organizations again petition the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to list the black-tailed prairie dog as a threatened or endangered species.

Appendix 2

Dakota Tribal Divisions and a Lakota Calendar

Dakota Tribal Divisions

Lakota spellings have been simplified here, omitting diacritical marks. Sources are based on various authorities, including the *Lakota Dictionary* (E. Buechel and P. Manhart, 2002).

Divisions and Subdivisions of the Dakota Nation (*Oceti Sakowin*)

1. Titunwans (= Teton) or Western Dakotas (originally speaking the Lakota dialect)

Hunkpapa, Itzipco (= Sans Arcs), Minneconjou, Oglala, Oohenunpa (Two Kettles), Sicangu (= Brule) & Sihasapa (= Black Feet)

2. Wiciyelas or Central Dakotas (originally speaking the Nakota dialect)

Ihanktunwan (=Yanktons) & Ihanktunwanna (=Yanktonais)

3. Isantis (=Santees) or Eastern Dakotas (originally speaking the Dakota dialect)

Mdewakantunwon, Sissetunwon, Wahpekute, and Wahpetunwon (= Wahpeton)

A Lakota Calendar

Moons:

A total of thirteen moon cycles are present during a complete 365-day solar year, but twelve are listed here to try make the book text approximately conform with modern calendars. There are also variations in the names historically given to the moons by various Lakota-speaking groups. English versions of the more evocative ones, or those often used by the Oglalas, have been chosen for use in the text.

January: *wiocokanyan*, The Middle [of Winter] Moon

February: *cannopopa*, The Moon of Popping Trees (this term is sometimes also applied to early winter)

March: *istawicayazan*, The Moon of Snowblind Eyes

April: *wihakakta*, The Moon of Grass Appearing, or The Moon When the Ducks Come Back

May: *canwaptu*, The Moon of Shedding Ponies

June: *tinpsinla itkahca wi*, The Moon of Fattening

July: *canpasapa*, The Moon of Black Chokecherries, or The Moon When the Geese Shed Their Feathers

August: *wasuton wi*, The Moon of the Harvest

APPENDIX 2

September: *canwape gi wi*, The Moon of Buffalo Calves Turning Black

October: *canwape kasna wi*, The Moon of Falling Leaves

November: *takiyuha*, The Moon of Deer Mating

December: *tahecapsun*, The Moon of Antlers Shedding

Lakota Seasons

Winter: *waniyetu*

Spring: *wetu*

Summer: *bloteku*

Autumn: *ptanyetu*

Lakota Moon Phases

New Moon: *witanin*

Half Moon: *wiyaspa*

Full Moon: *wimimela*

Waning Moon: *wite*

Lakota Day Phases

Dawn: *anpo*

Noon: *sam iyaya*

Sunset: *wimaheya*

Night: *hanhepi*

Some Lakota Place Names and Concepts

These words may convey spiritually significant figures, qualities, directions, or specific locations, and thus are capitalized here.

The Badlands: *Mako Sica*

The Bear God: *Hu Nomp*

The Beautiful Woman (the Feminine Spirit): *Wohpe*

The Black Hills: *Paha Sapa* (or *Pa Sapa*)

The Coyote (Spirit of the Coyote): *Mica*

The Day: *Amp*

The Earth, Earth Spirit: *Maka*

The Eagle (Spirit of the Eagle): *Wambli*

The East (Spirit of the East, symbol of good will and of peace and light): *Wiyohiyampa*

The East Wind: *Yampa*

The Elk (Spirit of the Elk): *Hehaka*

The Falling Star: *Wolipe*

The First Man (the Masculine Spirit): *Tohahe*

The Four Winds: *Tatetob*

The Grandfathers, or Spirit Helpers: *Tunkasila*

The Great Bear constellation (The Spoon with a Long Tail): *Wicakiyuhapi*

The Great Mystery (or the Great Spirit): *Wakan-tanka*

The Heavens (Spirit of the Heavens): *Mahpiiya*

The Moon: *Hanwi*

The North (Spirit of the North, symbol of purification, strength, and endurance): *Waziata*

The North Wind: *Waziyatanhan*

APPENDIX 2

The Pine Ridge: *Wazi Ahanhan*

The Rock (a spiritually significant rock or boulder):
Inyan

The Sky: *Skan*

The Soul: *Hokisankiya*

The South (Spirit of the South, symbol of wisdom and warmth): *Itokaga*

The South Wind: *Itokagatanhan*

The Spider (also The Trickster Spirit, as well as spiders generally): *Iktomi*

The Spirit Road (Milky Way): *Wanagitacanku*

The Stars: *Wican*

The Sun: *Wi*

The Thunderbird (or the Winged One, Thunder-being):
Wakinyan, Wa-kee-an

The Two-legged (Man and Bear): *Hununpa*

The Water Monster (the Maker of Floods): *Uukehi*

The West (Spirit of the West, symbol of generosity and of rain): *Wiyohiheyata*

The West Wind: *Eya*

The Whirlwind: *Yumni*

The Wind (Father of the Four Winds, and of The Whirlwind): *Tatekan*

The Wolf (Spirit of the Wolf): *Sungamanitu*

Appendix 3

Mammals and Summer Birds of the Pine Ridge Reservation

Adapted from *Wild Mammals of South Dakota*. Species reliably reported from the Pine Ridge Reservation (Shannon or Jackson counties) are shown in **Bold**; the others have been reported from southwestern South Dakota and probably also occur locally. Lakota names for particular species or groups are provided where available.

Mammals

Shrews

Masked Shrew. Probably widespread, in damp habitats.

Bats (*hupakglake*)

Long-eared Myotis. Widespread, in wooded areas, caves, hibernates.

Western Small-footed Myotis. Widespread, in rocky habitats, hibernates.

Little Brown Myotis. Widespread, hibernates in caves and mines.

APPENDIX 3

Northern Myotis. Widespread, in wooded areas, hibernates.

Long-legged Myotis. Widespread, in forests, caves, buildings, hibernates.

Fringe-tailed Myotis. Widespread, in badlands, montane habitats, hibernates.

Silver-haired Bat. Widespread, in grassy valleys, migratory.

Big Brown Bat. Widespread, in caves, buildings, tree hollows, hibernates.

Eastern Red Bat. Widespread, migratory, tree-roosting.

Hoary Bat. Widespread, migratory, in woody habitats.

Western Big-eared Bat. Widespread, hibernates in caves.

Rabbits

Desert Cottontail (*mastinsapa*). Common in arid grasslands.

Eastern Cottontail (*mastinsapa*). Widespread in forest edges.

Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*mahstinshkah*). Uncommon in arid grasslands.

White-tailed Jackrabbit (*mahstinshkah*). Common in arid grasslands.

Squirrels, Prairie Dogs, and Pocket Gophers

Least Chipmunk. Diverse habitats, in badlands, rocky ravines, forest edges.

Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel. Widespread in grasslands, disturbed areas.

Spotted Ground Squirrel. Local in sandy grasslands.

Black-tailed Prairie Dog (*pispiza*). Common in arid grasslands.

Fox Squirrel (*hetkala*). Common in deciduous forests and streamside woods.

Northern Pocket Gopher (*wahnheya*). Widespread in clay and rocky soils.

Plains Pocket Gopher (*wahnheya*). Widespread in grasslands with deep soils.

Mice (*itubkala*), Rats (*itungtanka*), and Beavers

Olive-backed Pocket Mouse. Common in shortgrass habitats.

Plains Pocket Mouse. Common in sandy grasslands.

Silky Pocket Mouse. Widespread, uncommon in dry or sandy grasslands.

Hispid Pocket Mouse. Widespread, in sandy and rocky grasslands.

Ord's Kangaroo Rat. Widespread, in sandy grasslands.

Western Harvest Mouse. Widespread, in taller grasslands.

Plains Harvest Mouse. Widespread, in upland grasslands.

APPENDIX 3

White-footed Mouse. Common, in diverse habitats.

Deer Mouse. Common, in diverse habitats.

Northern Grasshopper Mouse. Widespread, in grasslands and shrublands.

Bushy-tailed Woodrat. Common, in rocky habitats and badlands.

Prairie Vole. Widespread, in taller grasslands.

Meadow Vole. Widespread, in moist grasslands.

Muskrat. Widespread, associated with standing-water habitats.

House Mouse. Introduced, associated with humans.

Norway Rat. Introduced, associated with humans.

Meadow Jumping Mouse. Common, in moist meadows.

Beaver (*chapa*). Widespread, associated with rivers and creeks.

Porcupines

Porcupine (*pahhini*). Widespread near woods, especially pines.

Coyotes, Wolves and Foxes

Gray Wolf (*sunkmanitu tanka*; *shunkah*). Extirpated by 1890; a few recent South Dakota sightings.

Swift Fox (*meeyalichah*, *tokala*). Rare, in native short-grass and mixed-grass prairies.

Red Fox (*shoghila*). Widespread in diverse habitats, especially woods.

Weasels, Badgers, and Skunks

Raccoon. Widespread, often near trees and water.

Long-tailed Weasel (*itunkasin*). Widespread in diverse habitats.

Least Weasel (*itunkasin*). Local in diverse habitats, often near water.

American Marten. Reintroduced after early extirpation; now local in coniferous woods.

Mink. Widespread, near rivers and marshes.

Black-footed Ferret. Extirpated, but with reintroductions underway, in grasslands with prairie dogs.

Badger (*hoka*). Widespread, in grasslands.

Spotted Skunk (*makah*). Uncommon, near forest edges.

Striped Skunk (*makah*). Common, in grasslands and woods.

Bobcats and Mountain Lions

Mountain Lion (*igmu*). Rare, in woods and rocky habitats.

Bobcat (*igmuhota*). Uncommon, in diverse open habitats.

Elk, Deer, Bighorn Sheep, and Pronghorns

Elk (*hehaka*). Reintroduced after extirpation in 1880s, in grasslands and open woods.

Mule Deer (*tahcha, sintesapela*). Widespread, in brushland and open woods.

APPENDIX 3

White-tailed Deer (*tahheenchalah, sintelulyapi*). Widespread, in forest edges and grasslands.

Bison (*tatanka*). Extirpated by late 1880s, but locally reintroduced, in native prairies.

Bighorn Sheep (*tatoka*). Extirpated by early 1900s, but locally reintroduced, in badlands and rimrock habitats.

Pronghorn (*tahheenchah*). Increasing after near-extirpation, in dry grasslands.

Birds

This list is based in part on *Birds of South Dakota* and *The South Dakota Breeding Bird Atlas*. Probable or confirmed breeding species in Shannon and Jackson counties shown in **bold**; the other listed species are possible but unproven breeders.

Swans, Geese, and Ducks

Trumpeter Swan (*magaska*). Rare, in larger wetlands.
Canada Goose (*maga sapa*). Uncommon, in wetlands.
Wood Duck. Uncommon, in wooded wetlands.
Gadwall. Common, in shallow wetlands .
American Wigeon. Uncommon, in shallow wetlands.
Mallard. Common, in shallow wetlands.
Blue-winged Teal. Common, in shallow wetlands.
Northern Shoveler. Common, in shallow wetlands.
Northern Pintail. Common, in shallow wetlands.
Green-winged Teal. Common, in shallow wetlands.
Ruddy Duck. Uncommon, in marshy wetlands.

Pheasant, Grouse, and Turkeys

Ring-necked Pheasant. Uncommon (introduced) resident, in weedy grasslands.
Sharp-tailed Grouse (*shiocitkala*). Uncommon resident, in prairies.
Wild Turkey (*wagleksun*). Uncommon (re-established), resident, near woodlands.

Grebes (*zintkala canhpanla*)

Pied-billed Grebe. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Pelicans and Cormorants

American White Pelican (*bleza*). Uncommon, in wetlands with fish.

Double-crested Cormorant (*huntka*). Uncommon, in wetlands with fish.

Hérons and Bitterns

American Bittern. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Great Blue Heron (*hoka*). Uncommon, in wetlands.

Vultures

Turkey Vulture (*heca*). Common, in open plains.

Hawks (*cetan*) and Eagles

Bald Eagle. Rare, in woods near water.

Northern Harrier. Uncommon, in meadows and marshes.

Cooper's Hawk. Uncommon, in denser woodlands.

Swainson's Hawk. Uncommon, in grasslands.

Red-tailed Hawk. Uncommon, in woodlands and grasslands.

APPENDIX 3

Ferruginous Hawk. Uncommon, in open prairies and badlands.

Golden Eagle (*huya*). Rare, in grasslands and badlands.

Falcons

American Kestrel (*okihyan*). Uncommon, in woodland edges and prairies.

Merlin. Uncommon, in plains and woodlands.

Prairie Falcon. Uncommon, in plains and badlands.

Coots

American Coot (*cantipan*). Uncommon, in wetlands.

Plovers (*sislova*), Sandpipers (*mimiopawakinyela*), and Snipes

Killdeer. Common, near water.

American Avocet. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Willet. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Spotted Sandpiper. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Upland Sandpiper (*pse*). Uncommon, in meadows.

Long-billed Curlew (*ticannica*). Uncommon, in meadows.

Marbled Godwit. Uncommon, in meadows.

Wilson's Snipe (*hokagipa*). Uncommon, in wetlands.

Wilson's Phalarope. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Gulls (*wicatankala*) and Terns

Ring-billed Gull. Common, in wetlands.

California Gull. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Forster's Tern. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Black Tern. Uncommon, in wetlands.

Doves and Pigeons

Rock Pigeon. Common, near humans (introduced).

Mourning Dove (*makinyela*). Abundant, in open country and brushland.

Cuckoos (*coka sapa*)

Black-billed Cuckoo. Uncommon, in woodlands.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Uncommon, in woodlands.

Owls (*hinhan*)

Barn Owl. Rare, in open country.

Eastern Screech-Owl (*pagla, osniko*). Uncommon, in woodlands.

Great Horned Owl (*hinyankaga*). Uncommon, in woodlands.

Burrowing Owl (*hinhan ilpahloti*). Common, in prairie-dog towns.

Long-eared Owl. Uncommon, in woodlands.

Short-eared Owl. Uncommon, in plains and meadows.

Nighthawks and Poorwills

Common Nighthawk (*pisco*). Common, around villages.

Common Poorwill (*pakoskalap*). Uncommon, in rocky scrub.

Swifts

White-throated Swift. Uncommon, near buttes and cliffs.

Kingfishers

Belted Kingfisher (*kusleca*). Uncommon, along waterways.

Woodpeckers (*toskala*)

Red-headed Woodpecker. Uncommon, in open woods.

Downy Woodpecker. Common, in open woods.

Hairy Woodpecker. Uncommon, in open woods.

Northern Flicker. Common, in open woods and edges.

Flycatchers

Western Wood-Pewee. Uncommon, in woodlands.

Eastern Phoebe. Uncommon, near waterways.

Say's Phoebe. Uncommon, in open country and badlands.

Great Crested Flycatcher. Uncommon, in woodlands.
Cassin's Kingbird. Uncommon, in dry pine canyons.
Western Kingbird. Common, in pine woodlands.
Eastern Kingbird. Common, in woodlands.

Shrikes

Loggerhead Shrike (*cetan watapela*). Uncommon, in open country.

Vireos (*zintkazila*)

Bell's Vireo. Common, in bushy prairie.
Warbling Vireo. Common, in tall cottonwood groves.
Red-eyed Vireo. Uncommon, in deciduous woodlands.

Jays, Magpies, and Crows

Blue Jay (*zinkatogleglega*). Common, in diverse habitats and around villages.
Black-billed Magpie (*halhate*). Common, in diverse arid habitats.
American Crow (*kangi*). Common, in diverse habitats.

Larks

Horned Lark (*wabloska*). Common, in open country.

Swallows (*upijata*)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow. Common, near banks and cliffs.

Bank Swallow. Uncommon, near clay banks.

Barn Swallow. Common, near buildings.

Cliff Swallow. Common, near bridges and cliffs.

Chickadees and Nuthatches

Black-capped Chickadee (*wiyawala*). Common, in woods and villages.

Red-breasted Nuthatch. Uncommon, in pine woods and villages.

White-breasted Nuthatch. Common, in woods and villages.

Wrens (*canheyela*)

Rock Wren. Common, in rocky country and badlands.

House Wren. Common, in woods and villages.

Marsh Wren. Uncommon, in marshy wetlands.

Bluebirds and Robins

Eastern Bluebird (*zinkato*). Rare, in deciduous woods and edges.

Mountain Bluebird (*zinkato*). Uncommon, in pine forests and edges.

American Robin (*sisoka*). Abundant, in villages and woods.

Catbirds and Thrashers

Gray Catbird. Common, in forest edges and brush.

Brown Thrasher (*cehupaglagla*). Common, in forest edges and brush.

Starlings

European Starling. Abundant, near humans (introduced).

Waxwings

Cedar Waxwing. Common, in cities, villages, and parks.

Warblers (*situpiwānblila*)

Yellow Warbler. Common, in tall brush and wetlands.

Yellow-rumped Warbler. Common, in pine forests.

American Redstart. Uncommon, in deciduous forests.

Common Yellowthroat. Common, in marshy wetlands.

Yellow-breasted Chat. Common, in brushy habitats.

Towhees (*canguguyagleska*), Sparrows (*iuhaotila*), and Juncos (*cantu sapela*)

Spotted Towhee. Common, in brushy canyons.

Chipping Sparrow. Common, in pine forests.

Field Sparrow. Common, in brushy fields.

Vesper Sparrow. Uncommon, in open grasslands.

Lark Sparrow (*situpi ahayetonpi*). Common, in brushy edges.

Lark Bunting. Common, in native grasslands.

Grasshopper Sparrow (*zinkalaslila*). Common, in mixed prairies.

Song Sparrow. Common, in brushy habitats near water.

Dark-eyed Junco. Common, in pine forests.

Grosbeaks and Buntings

Black-headed Grosbeak. Common, in deciduous woodlands.

Blue Grosbeak. Common, in open brushlands.

Lazuli Bunting, *Passerina amoena*. Common, in brushy edges.

Indigo Bunting. Uncommon, in brushlands near water.

Dickcissel. Uncommon, in meadows and moist fields.

Meadowlarks, Blackbirds Orioles, and Cowbirds

Bobolink. Uncommon, in wet meadows.

Red-winged Blackbird (*wahpatanka*). Abundant, in marshes, ditches, meadows.

Eastern Meadowlark (*jialepa*). Rare, in taller or moist prairies.

Western Meadowlark (*jialepa*, *winapela*). Abundant, in mixed prairies.

Yellow-headed Blackbird. Uncommon, in deeper wetlands.

Brewer's Blackbird. Uncommon, in scattered scrublands.

Common Grackle. Abundant, near villages.

Brown-headed Cowbird (*pteyahpa*). Abundant, in grasslands and brushy edges.

Orchard Oriole. Common in, canyons and waterway edges.

Baltimore Oriole (*skeluta*). Rare, in tall deciduous groves.

Bullock's Oriole (*skeluta*). Common, in tall deciduous groves.

Finches (*wanblitaheya*)

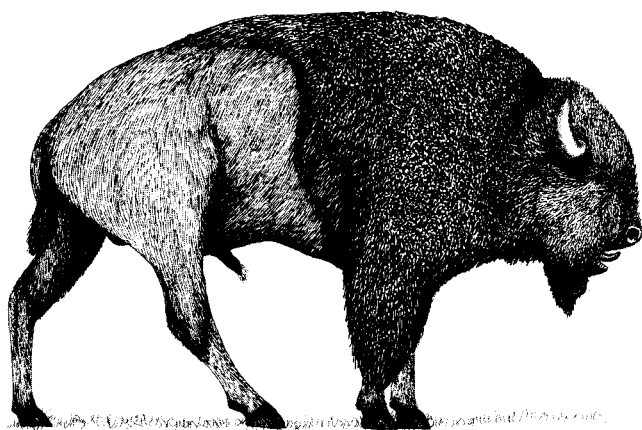
House Finch. Uncommon, near villages.

American Goldfinch. Common, in weedy fields and villages.

APPENDIX 3

Old World Sparrows

House Sparrow (*pacansihuta*). Abundant, near humans (introduced).



Bison male

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